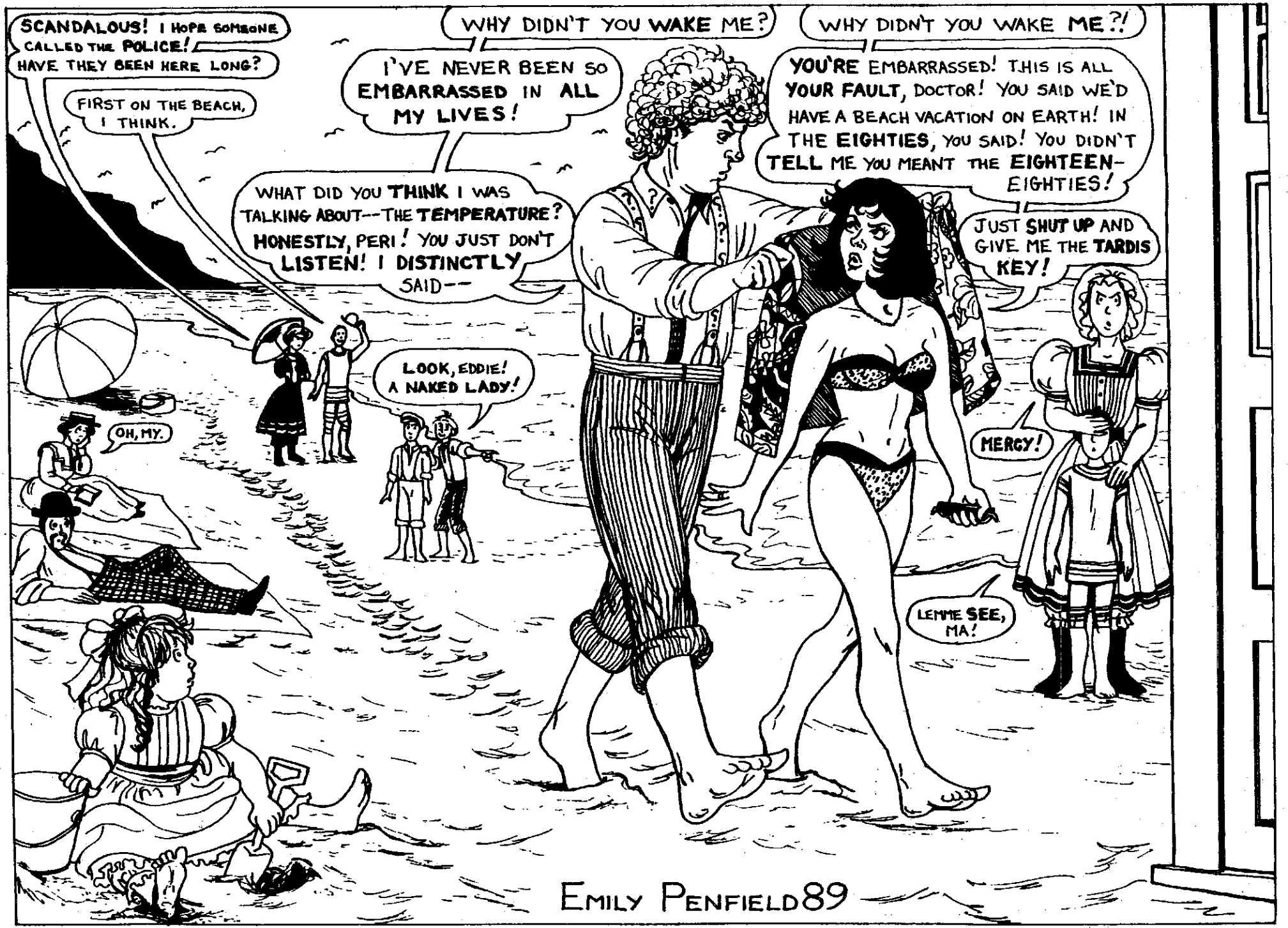
BANZINE!


SCANDALOUS! I HOPE SOMEONE CALLED THE POLICE! HAVE THEY BEEN HERE LONG?
FIRST ON THE BEACH, I THINK.
WHY DIDN'T YOU WAKE ME?
I'VE NEVER BEEN SO EMBARRASSED IN ALL MY LIVES!
WHAT DID YOU THINK I WAS TALKING ABOUT--THE TEMPERATURE? HONESTLY, PERI! YOU JUST DON'T LISTEN! I DISTINCTLY SAID--
LOOK, EDDIE! A NAKED LADY!
OH, MY.
WHY DIDN'T YOU WAKE ME?!
YOU'RE EMBARRASSED! THIS IS ALL YOUR FAULT, DOCTOR! YOU SAID WE'D HAVE A BEACH VACATION ON EARTH! IN THE EIGHTIES, YOU SAID! YOU DIDN'T TELL ME YOU MEANT THE EIGHTEEN-EIGHTIES!
JUST SHUT UP AND GIVE ME THE TARDIS KEY!
MERCY!
LEMME SEE, MA!
EMILY PENFIELD89

BANZINE!

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DW Doctor Who **B7** Blake's 7 **BB** Buckaroo Banzai **KTD** Kill the Dead **GB** Real Ghostbusters

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THE INEVITABLE EDITOR'S PAGE(S)

THE GENERAL NONSENSE SECTION

As my brother used to say in the days before he was completely potty trained: "I'M DOOOOOONNNNNEEEEE!!!!"

Since my baby brother has had the unmitigated gall to turn 23 this year, to say nothing of the fact that he's now taller than I am, I feel quite justified to humiliate him in this, the first issue of BANZINE!. Having done so, I will no longer regale you with family matters, and will focus on the zine itself.

BANZINE! has been like a roller coaster ride, sending me from utter delight ("this is going to be GREAT!") to utter depression ("oh God, what am I going to do?"). One of the primary worries was discovering that my page count was going **way** over my anticipated limits. The Smith-Corona PWP6 has a lovely feature that permits you to see the text you've entered in page format. It also has a disturbing tendency to mind-wipe on its disks, which is why mine has been christened "Blake", but that's another story. But after doing some quick estimating on costs, I quickly realized that the zine was rapidly heading for a $15+ cost, which didn't appeal to me, my VISA card, my printer, or my potential buyers. So the majority of the zine has been reduced to keep the price around the $10 level. I was gratified with the results, and I think you will be too.

One of the goals I've set is to print original, unusual material, which I think defines many of the stories and poems within. More importantly, I wanted to give beginning writers and artists a chance to get a break and gain confidence in their work. Had it not been for an editor or two about six years ago, I doubt that I would have continued writing (or editing, subsequently). So this is my way of passing the torch on.

A few important items here. "Chasing Shadows" was originally published in THE LIEUTENANT'S LOG, a letterzine put out bi-monthly by Atlanta Lea's Unofficial Harry Sullivan Fan Club. "Snowbank", "Bust the Dead" and "The Competition" were originally scheduled to appear in GHYSTE MORTUA, Deb Walsh's Kill the Dead fanzine which was unfortunately axed. For those who may not be acquainted with the book, Kill the Dead is a Tanith Lee novel about a ghost-killer and a minstrel thief who bear "uncanny" resemblances to Paul Darrow and Michael Keating, respectively. When you consider that Ms. Lee wrote two episodes of BLAKE'S 7, you can draw your own conclusions.

I am currently accepting submissions for BANZINE! #2. I am looking for B7, Buckaroo Banzai, Real Ghostbusters, and other genres for submissions at the moment--I've been flooded with Doctor Who material, which is nice in that it's good to see a revival of interest in the show, but I'd like to print a balanced zine! Submission guidelines are in the back for interested parties.

THE "THANK YOU" SECTION:

First off, special thanks to my wonderful contributors: Laura Virgil, Emily Penfield, Leah Rosenthal, Eric Hoffman, Melissa Mastoris, Lisa Savignano, Betty "Cupernicus" Cunningham, Jan Grokett, Annita Smith, Nora Mai, M.J. Dolan, Lisa Conner, Kathryn Andersen, Judi Boguslawski, Steven Veverka, Adrian Morgan, Jacqueline Taero, Julie Nowak, Kim McCarthy, Donna Carroll, "Stew", Kathy

Hintze, Kim Wigmore, Mark Sellmeyer, Karen "Rio" River, Pat Dunn (my first contributor!), William Ader, C.K. Smith, and Holly Hutchison.

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THE "DEDICATION" SECTION:

BANZINE! #1 is especially dedicated to:

NORA MAI--who for the past five years or so has patiently put up with my last-minute requests for artwork and layout assistance, who offers advice that always is on-target, and for everything else she's done besides being a good friend. People like Nora are rare indeed, and this is much-overdue tribute for all she's done for me!

LEAH ROSENTHAL--who has quickly become a good friend, advisor, shoulder to cry on, and encourager, to say nothing of being one heckuva great artist! Leah is someone that invariably cheers me up whenever I call down Florida way--now if she'd just stop sending all that "Florida Tourism" stuff through the mails! Leah's one in a million, and it's a privilege to know her!

MARY MORRIS--better known as my wife, which alone should get her sainthood status. She's my chief goad and inspiration, the person who keeps me going and never lets me forget to have fun, and I shudder to think what my life would be without her. My fiesty redhead...everything I do is dedicated to you, but I wanted this to be special. Thanks so much for being you.

Okay, that's it from me. **ENJOY!!!!!**

JSM

BAR
THIS END UP
Leah Rosenthal

CHASING SHADOWS

by Eric Hoffman

art by Leah Rosenthal

For the umpteenth time since she had begun her adventures with the Doctor, Sarah Jane vowed that she would never, never, never allow him to talk her into travelling with him in his ship again!

However, in order to carry out her vow, there was one little thing she would have to do. Get out of her latest predicament in one piece! Alive!

As she scrunched down as far as she could, her eardrums were assaulted by the sound of gunshots echoing in the cavernous spaces of the warehouse. The warehouse where she was hiding behind a barricade of crates and packing cases while a gang of trigger-happy hoodlums blazed away with unfriendly intentions.

As the girl tried to stay out of the line of fire as much as possible, Sarah Jane Smith couldn't help but think to herself that while the situation was a little more down-to-earth than usual, it still followed the pattern of things where her travels with the Doctor were concerned.

* * * * * * *

It had started as another one of the Doctor's excursions in the TARDIS. The promised destination had been New York City during the 1930's. For once, the erratic time/space craft had gotten to its proper destination and time, depositing them in an alleyway beside what had turned out to be a very impressive looking building. A brass plate on the front door identified it, in gleaming polished letters, as THE COBALT CLUB.

"The Cobalt Club?" Sarah had asked the Doctor, who was looking at the building with his familiar grin and his floppy hat pushed back on his head.

"Yes," the Doctor had replied with an expansive sweep of his arm. "One of the most exclusive private clubs in the entire city. Where the most successful men in all professions gather to escape the hustle and bustle of the outside world. Where some of the most affluent men...or the most famous...enjoy the nicer things of life. All terribly snobbish in its own way..."

"And chauvinistic," Sarah Jane snarled.

"I beg your pardon?" the Doctor said.

"You said, and I quote, 'Where the most successful men in all professions gather'!" Sarah Jane snapped. "What about women?"

For a moment, the Doctor's face had a slightly uncomfortable look on it as Sarah glared at him and demanded, "Well?" in a chilly tone.

"Well...you see...ah...Women's Lib hasn't really been born yet, Sarah Jane. There are very few women who have actually tried to become successful in what have been generally male dominated professions. This is still the '30s, you know."

Sarah's only reply was another glare and a "Hmph!" as the Doctor took her by the arm and steered her towards the club's entrance with a hopeful "Come along." Sarah Jane was prepared to dig in her heels and be stubborn about joining the Doctor in what she considered a male chauvinist's club, but the Doctor was, as usual, irresistible and Sarah soon found herself joining him, expecting them both to be thrown out of the exclusive club as soon as they walked inside, the Doctor's long scarf trailing behind them.

What happened next was the last thing Sarah Jane expected. Instead of being asked to leave, they were being ushered into a huge, lavishly furnished dining room. All because the Doctor had shown the slightly frowning concierge what appeared to be some special card. The card was obviously some kind of special 'open sesame' to the club. Seconds later, the concierge's frown had become a respectful smile. Sarah had the strange sensation that she was actually seeing a red carpet being rolled out for them as the concierge escorted her and the Doctor to a table. The Doctor, meanwhile, was asking about the man's health and about one or two individuals who were apparently members.

"Is Mr. Cranston..." Sarah heard the Doctor start to say before her attention was captured by some photographs on the wall. One of them took her completely by surprise!

It showed a rugged-looking individual in the clothes and pith helmet of an explorer or big-game hunter, along with another figure. Both stood next to a cage containing what had to be possibly the most ferocious-looking tiger she had ever seen. The hunter was smiling slightly, while his companion grinned in a manner all too familiar!

"Doctor!" she called. The Doctor excused himself from the concierge (who had then turned to Sarah, bowed slightly and said "I hope you enjoy your visit with us, Miss."

before returning to the club's front desk), and joined her. Indicating the picture, Sarah said, "You never told me you knew..." "Frank?" the Doctor said with a grin. "Oh yes, gave him a few pointers on that little trip. A beauty, wasn't it...the tiger, I mean..."

"But that's **Frank Buck**!" she exclaimed.

"Of course it is," the Doctor declared, "...mind you, I've never quite forgiven him for not giving me some credit for that 'Bring 'Em Back Alive' remark...but still, that's how legends are made, I guess."

Looking around, the Doctor grabbed Sarah by the arm and hustled her off towards a table. "It looks like my friend hasn't been here for awhile, so we'll just take pot luck, look around little old New York, and then be on our way back to UNIT H.Q. How does that sound?"

It was all a little fast for Sarah, but, as in other situations with the Doctor, the only thing to do was to make the best of it. She soon found herself enjoying a Lobster Thermidor worthy of some of the finest European restaurants. To her amazement, the Doctor had forsaken his seemingly one-item diet of jelly babies and was enjoying a similar repast as he looked about the room, pointing out this person or another. Sarah was amazed at some of the people who were dining in the same room. For example, the last thing she had expected to see was a noted Wall Street financier, known to be something of a recluse, or a thin, almost shy looking young man with a moustache, whom the Doctor said was a noted aviator, among his other talents, at table.

"You know, I'm almost sorry my friend isn't here," the Doctor lamented. "He's a most remarkable individual...almost as remarkable as myself...in fact, we have been said to resemble one another...He's had some unusual exploits...they'd make a great story for you...or have they been written down already?..."

All this was said between mouthfuls of food until the Doctor and Sarah had finished their luncheon and started to rise--just as a stout, official-looking figure started across the room towards them.

"Oh dear," the Doctor groaned, "I was hoping he wouldn't be here today. He can be such a pain."

Within the next few minutes, the Doctor had introduced Sarah to the Police Commissioner of New York, one Ralph Weston, who proved to be a bit of a stuffed shirt as far as Sarah was concerned. The Commissioner had obviously met the Doctor, in this incarnation, before, and despite the Time Lord's bohemian appearance, which clashed vividly with the business-suited or even formally-dressed occupants of the room, seemed to consider him somebody important enough to associate with.

After a few minutes of conversation, during which Sarah could sense that the Doctor was using all of his control to be civil, they were released by Weston with a "You must come up to my office and visit one day, Doctor. I'm sure that your friend, being a journalist, would be interested in seeing how our city's police force operates. I'll tell Lamont that you were looking for him."

As Weston walked off to bend somebody else's ear, the Doctor gave a sigh and ushered Sarah to the front door. "I thought he'd never stop. Nice chap...I think, but he's so...so..."

"Pompous?" Sarah chimed in.

"Yes, that's the word!" the Doctor agreed. "A bit of a social climber, I'm afraid, but still a good basic police official,...for cases that aren't too demanding." Then, with his toothy Cheshire Cat grin, the Doctor rubbed his hands together and said, "Well, what shall we do now, Sarah? I have it! That sight-seeing tour of New York in the Roaring 30s?"

"That was the Roaring 20s, Doctor," Sarah said with a cheeky smile.

"Well, what's a decade or two among friends, eh?" the Time Lord replied, just as the stepped out of the club and into the cool, crisp late afternoon air. Suddenly the Doctor stopped and exclaimed, "Ah! I know! Just the ticket...how about a trip up the Empire State Building?"

"Just so long as it's in a lift and not in the paw of a giant gorilla!" Sarah laughed...

...moments before a large black car screeched to a halt in front of them and four large, unpleasant-looking men jumped out and rushed at them! The next few moments were a chaotic, confused blur to Sarah Jane as two of the men attacked the Doctor, while the other pair grabbed Sarah by the arms...or tried to. Sarah had no intention of making things easy for them by playing the helpless, terrified screaming female. A kick in the ankle brought a howl of pain from one of the would-be kidnappers, while a swing of her purse brought a grunt from the other man as his snap-brim hat lost some of its dapper appearance.

A brief image of the surprised Doctor going down under the attack of his two burly assailants flashed through Sarah's mind before her captors finally managed to push and shove the struggling girl into their car (although she made sure that they would have enough bruises and aches to remember for some time). The Doctor's attackers had apparently put the Time Lord out of action, and were now frantically piling into the front seat of the car.

"I don't believe this!" Sarah thought to herself as she sank her teeth into a hand that was attempting to muffle any cries for help.

As the car raced away from the Cobalt Club, she found herself thinking, *"My god! I'm being taken for a ride! What is this, The Untouchables!"*

* * * * * * *

Shaking his head was a mistake, the Doctor soon discovered, as he tried to get his senses back in working order. The explosion of pain going through him felt as if a dozen Sontarans were doing a victory dance all over his skull.

The sensation of hands assisting him to his feet penetrated the Doctor's fog of disorientation. He opened his eyes and looked around him. Everything seemed to be intact. Two arms...two legs...one head...although it felt like it had been subdivided into several parts...one scarf...one Sarah Jane...SARAH JANE! What happened to Sarah Jane!

His attempt to walk sent a wave of dizziness through the Doctor as several people, including the club's concierge, helped him back inside the Cobalt Club.

A familiar voice penetrated the Doctor's whirling thoughts. The face of Police Commissioner Weston bore a worried frown.

"I'm afraid I have some bad news for you, old man," he began.

"Sarah Jane! What's happened to Sarah Jane?" the Doctor blurted out, his senses telling him that the worst had happened.

"I'm afraid she's been kidnapped by those gentlemen who attacked you," the club's concierge stated.

"What!" the Doctor shouted, jumping to his feet, then sitting down again as his knees started to give out on him. "We've got to find her!" he said.

"I've already called headquarters. Every available man will be put on the job," the Commissioner said. "But I should tell you that you tangled with some pretty rough customers."

"You don't have to tell me that!" the Doctor snarled, feeling a bit more like his old self. "What I want to know is, why they attacked us and took my friend."

"You mean you never saw any of them before?" Weston demanded.

"Never in any of my lives!" the Doctor replied.

"Well, it was just a thought...of course..." Weston paused for a moment and looked at a picture on the wall by the concierge's desk, then added, "...There is something of a resemblance, and they could have mistaken you for him..."

At Weston's words, the Doctor's gaze travelled over to the picture that had attracted the official's attention. Gazing back at him was the sleepy-eyed face of a man who was almost, but not quite, a double for the Doctor. Although the face was a bit leaner, it seemed to say that this was an individual who really preferred not to exert himself very much, unless it was absolutely necessary. The one thing that both faces had in common was the nose; large, prominent, almost hawkish noses.

"You mean they thought I might have been him?" the Doctor exclaimed.

"I think so," Weston replied. "Those men were members of a gang that he helped round up, acting as a special investigator. He seems to be very good at that sort of thing..."

"So they thought I was him and kidnapped my friend for revenge?"

"Probably. You haven't been around for awhile. He has a lady friend now, name of Margo Lane. They probably thought that's who your young lady was."

At this, the Doctor, feeling more like his old self, got to his feet and started for the club's doors. "I can't wait around for your men to come up with something, Commissioner. There's no telling what they might do to Sarah if they think she's this Margo Lane person."

"But what can you do, Doctor?" Weston demanded.

"I have my methods," the Doctor snapped. "I'll be checking back with you to see if you've found anything."

With that, the Doctor plunged through the doors of the club and stalked out into the street, leaving Weston and the concierge staring after him, shaking their heads.

"He acts just like Lamont," Weston muttered. "They've got to be related!"

* * * * * * *

The figure in the blue-lit shadows of the darkened room listened as the voice on the other end of the telephone relayed information. Only the faint buzzing of the telephone voice penetrated the silence as the listener sat like a statue, digesting the information before replying, "Remain at your post. Inform me of any new developments."

Another buzz of words and the clock of a connection being closed were heard before the listener hung up his telephone. A sigh seemed to fill the room, one of resignation something not completely unwelcome, yet familiar.

"So you're back, my friend...you're back..."

* * * * * * *

"It was a stroke of luck that you were returning to your cab," the Doctor said as the yellow taxi cab made a right turn while he stared intently at a device in his hand.

The driver, recognized as one of the best cabbies in New York City, grinned around the cigarette he was smoking and looked briefly at his passenger in the rear view mirror. "I saw a little of that fracas in front of the Cobalt Club. When you came out looking for someone, I figured you might need a hack...and I'd have a little fun besides pickin' up a fare."

"Well, I don't know about the fun part of it, but you are definitely carrying a fare...turn right again!..." the Doctor suddenly directed, watching the device in his hand.

It looked like a stop watch, but in reality it was one of a pair of homing devices the Doctor and Sarah kept with them after a couple of adventures in which they had become separated from the ship or each other. Fortunately, even in her particular situation, Sarah Jane had had the presence of mind to activate her device. Now the Doctor was following the indications on the face of the "watch", hoping they would lead him to his companion.

After his rush out of the Cobalt Club, he had realized he didn't have transportation. He had been looking around frantically when a slightly gruff voice had inquired, "Need a cab, mister?"

With a wild grin, the Doctor had rushed for the colorful vehicle with a shouted, "Transport of Delight!", gotten inside, and asked the driver, "Did you see a large black car drive off from here with four rather unpleasant-looking gentlemen and a not-so-willing young lady as passengers?"

"Yeah," the cabby had replied. "They went off that way..." (a finger pointing East was the first indication of the direction Sarah's kidnappers had taken). "Right!" the Doctor had snapped. "Follow that car!"

The driver's protests that he had no idea where the other car was going caused the Doctor to rummage in his coat pockets until he had found the homing device and turned it on. It was a couple of minutes before the indicators on the device's face had come on and the Doctor was ordering the driver to move on.

* * * * * * *

"Look, just what is the meaning of all this?" Sarah Jane Smith demanded. "If you're expecting to get a big ransom for me, you're going to be very disappointed!"

The leader of her four captors, a rough-looking character in what seemed to be the cliche outfit for big city racketeers of the period (right down to the snap-brim hat), laughed at the angry girl and waved a hand at her.

"You can knock off the act, sister," he said. "We know who you are..."

"I'm **Sarah Jane Smith** and I'm a free-lance journalist..."

"I said you can knock it off!" the gangster snarled. "We saw you with your pal and the only dame he hangs around with is you. We might ask for a ransom, Miss Lane..."

"Lane!" Sarah exclaimed. "But I told you, my name is **Sarah Jane Smith**..."

"Boy, you sure stick to a story, don't you? Guess that's why he lets you work with him. Listen, Miss Margo Lane, your boyfriend got the goods on us and broke up one of the sweetest little counterfeiting rackets this city ever saw. A lot of my boys are in prison, all because of him, sticking his big nose into my business!

"Well, now it's our turn to get even. We don't like nosy detectives, especially ones that queer our business. So now we've got you. And through you, we're gonna get him! We'll just wait awhile and let him stew a bit. Then we'll contact him at that fancy club he belongs to. And when he shows up to bargain for you, bye-bye Cranston."

"Cranston!" Sarah exclaimed. "You mean that man in the picture at the Cobalt Club..."

"Hey, boss!" one of the other kidnappers exclaimed. "She don't give up easy, does she? Either that, or she's nuts!"

At that, Sarah rose to her feet and marched indignantly over to the gang leader, glaring up at him. "Look, I told you before, you are making a very big mistake! I am not somebody named Margo Lane, my name is..."

"...Sarah Jane Smith," the gangster finished for her before laughing in her face. "At least you could have had better sense than to pick a phony name like that! Smith, yet! Now go sit down and shut up! We're going to wait nice and peaceful for your boyfriend to show...NOW MOVE IT!"

With a sniff of disgust (and a knot of worry in the pit of her stomach), Sarah Jane turned and returned to the chair she had been sitting in. As she sat, she looked around her, trying to spot any possible means of escape.

The fact that the location of her imprisonment was a small warehouse gave Sarah a moment of hope...until she recalled that there were only two exits. And one of the gunmen was standing guard outside. Even if she were able to make a run for the other door, she would more than likely be recaptured before she got out of the building.

Piles of boxes and crates all through the warehouse seemed to hold the promise of cover if she did manage to slip off. But the look on the gang leader's face told her that she would be watched like a hawk. All that remained was to take a page from the Doctor's book and wait for the right opportunity; and if it should come up, improvise.

And then the laughter filled the warehouse.

Cold, chilling laughter.

Sarah noted that she wasn't the only one who was startled (and a bit shaken) by the sound. Her captors had jerked and looked around, hands moving towards coat pockets that she knew held their guns. Suddenly, one of the hoodlums gasped and pointed.

A shadow had appeared on the wall above the stairs that led to one of the doors. A shadow that was huge, slightly distorted and looked like some strange creature out of a bad dream. Once more the chilling laughter could be heard before a voice spoke words of doom.

"THE WEED OF FRUIT BEARS BITTER CRIME... No, that's not right!"

"That's not him! Get that guy!"

Sarah had mentioned the muttered aside after the strange words had been spoken in appropriately theatrical, chilling tones.

At that moment, all hell broke loose!

Hoping that his impersonation of a figure feared by the underworld would prove effective enough to free his companion, the Doctor had managed to gain the advantage of surprise. With his own long coat and his ultra-long scarf arranged in a certain manner, he had managed to present a reasonable facsimile of the cloaked avenger of evil. He had even managed to get hold of one of the weapons belonging to a member of the gang. A massive firepiece (a .45 automatic, he thought) that he hoped he would never have to use. Besides his normal aversion to firearms, he had no idea how to handle the thing!

And then he had scrambled the words of one of the avenger's most famous sayings.

It was not one of his better moments.

The next moment saw the Doctor frantically ducking and dodging a fusillade of shots aimed his way by the angry gangsters. At the same instant, the Time Lord had reflexively tightened his finger on the trigger of the huge pistol in his hand. The result was a very loud shot being fired and the Doctor slamming into the wall from the recoil!

Bouncing off the wall like a ping-pong ball, the Doctor unintentionally pulled the trigger and found himself bouncing off the wall again!

The next few minutes were a mad whirl for Sarah Jane. Seeing that her captors were distracted by the Doctor, the girl decided to take a chance, get to a door and go for help. For a moment, it looked as if she was going to make it, until a voice she recognized as belonging to one of her kidnappers shouted, "The Lane dame's getting away!"

This was followed by a shot blasting a chunk out of a nearby crate. With a yelp Sarah changed direction and decided that the next best move was to find some cover for what she was sure would be a hail of bullets fired by all concerned. She was just about to duck into the relative safety of a "wall" of packing cases when a familiar figure joined her...crashing to the floor from above!

When Sarah's kidnappers had opened fire on him, then followed their move by charging after him, the Doctor decided that discretion was the better part of valor. Throwing the huge .45 away before he did more damage to himself with it, he spotted Sarah Jane making for a mass of packing crates and decided that she had the most practical idea at that particular moment.

Taking a running leap, the Doctor vaulted the railing of the stairs of the main floor of the warehouse...realizing too late that in the chaos he had misjudged the distance. What happened next made his discovery entirely academic as Time Lord and floor met in a collision that knocked the breath out of him.

Sarah had expected anything <u>except</u> the Doctor's "crashing" entrance. A groan told her that he was still alive and in spite of the angry shouts and gunfire from her captors, she managed to grab the Doctor's arm and haul him bodily to the barricade of packing cases.

As she tried to rouse him, the Doctor babbled, "I want my money back! The parachute didn't open!" just as his eyes opened...

Just as another laugh rang through the warehouse.

This time, however, it was more frightening than the one the Doctor had given during his ill-fated rescue attempt. It was more chilling, filled with a promise of relentless retribution, touching with something that was not of this world. There also seemed to be a touch of madness in it as well!

It scared the hell out of Sarah Jane Smith.

As the mad laughter began, the Doctor's eyes had widened even more and he had sat upright as if galvanized by an electric shock. "Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "How did he manage to find us?"

In spite of herself, Sarah Jane found herself looking towards where the laughter had seemed to come from and beheld a sight that she would remember for quite some time.

The gangsters were standing there, gaping at a figure who stood where the Doctor had stood. But instead of standing, the figure seemed to be looming, almost larger than life, swathed in a massive black cloak whose shadow seemed to make the being look like a giant bat! A large slouch hat (that reminded Sarah a little of the Doctor's floppy fedora) covered some of the stranger's face, while the upturned collar of the figure's cloak covered most of the bottom part. But two things <u>were</u> visible; a hawk-like nose that resembled the Doctor's except that it was leaner, fiercer. And above that prominent nose were a pair of eyes that burned with a look that even made the girl afraid.

And words were spoken in a chilling, ringing tone that seemed to fill the entire building!

"THE WEED OF CRIME BEARS BITTER FRUIT!! CRIME DOES NOT PAY!!!!"

Again the cry of "Get him!" from the gangsters, but this time there was a touch of fear in it as the terrifying voice spoke once more.

"Surrender! Throw down your weapons or face the consequences!"

As soon as the words were intoned, Sarah Jane and the Doctor saw the figure's hands emerge from the folds of his cloak of darkness, each gloved hand brandishing a .45 automatic similar to the weapon that the Doctor had had his misadventure with.

"Doctor!" Sarah breathed. "They're gigantic!" "And they pack quite a kick, too!" the Doctor recalled with a wince of pain.

Again the yell from the gang leader and the three heavies opened fire at the being of the shadows...who suddenly seemed to vanish into the darkness with ringing, mocking laughter.

Once more the warehouse was filled with the roar of gunfire, shouts and the almost maniacal laughter of the mysterious figure in black, who seemed to vanish and reappear in a manner that was almost supernatural!

Eager to see what was happening, the girl forgot her precarious position and started to stand up to get a better view of the mayhem. "Get down!" the Doctor commanded, grabbing her by the arm and pulling her back behind the packing cases seconds before a hail of bullets sent splinters of wood flying as the tide of battle began to turn in their direction. Instinct made Sarah Jane fall to her kness and press as close as possible to the cases.

A movement next to her caused Sarah to turn her head slightly in time to see the Doctor making his way off into the maze of cases and shadows. Grabbing the Doctor's trailing scarf, the girl gave a yank that brought a strangled "AAARGGHHH!" from the Doctor as he fell backwards, landing on his back at her feet.

"What are you trying to do, hang me?" he snarled at her. "I ought to do worse!" she snapped. "Just where do you think you were going?"

"I was going to try and help our side out a little bit," the Doctor said testily. "He may be a rather unusual individual, but three against one isn't exactly what I would call cricket, would you?"

"Perhaps you haven't noticed," Sarah hissed, "but those men are shooting guns out there! With real bullets! And they'd just as soon kill you...or me...as easily as they'd kill...whoever-he-is!"

"Somehow, I don't think our friend would appreciate your description of him," the Doctor said with that infuriating grin of his. "Besides, I just noticed that we have a new player entering the game."

At this, Sarah turned her head in time to see the door to the outside open and the thug who had been standing guard rush in, reaching into his coat for what Sarah was sure was a gun.

The Doctor, meanwhile, was frantically scrambling through the pockets of his coat. While Sarah watched the latest addition to the gangster's ranks move stealthily towards the melee (one of the gunmen was out of the fight thanks to a well-placed shot by the mysterious marksman), the Doctor gave a cry of triumph. As he pulled an object from his pocket, Sarah recognized it as one of the Time Lord's seemingly endless supply of yo-yos. Working quickly, the Doctor proceeded to create an improvised sling-shot by putting the yo-yo into a loop of his scarf. The next instant saw him leap to his feet, whirl the loop of scarf until it became a multi-colored blur, then let fly with the object inside it.

A rather loud THUNK! told Sarah that the improvised 'missle' had struck something. The sight of the fourth hoodlum crashing like a tree to the floor showed SArah where the Doctor's "conker" had hit.

With a pleased grin, the Doctor said, "The old David-and-Goliath bit always knocked them off their feet!"

As Sarah started to groan at the Doctor's awful joke, a box near the Time Lord suddenly erupted in a shower of splinters as bullets from the fallen gunman's partners tore into it!

"Oh, my fur and whiskers!" the Doctor yelped, diving for the floor.

The sounds of battle ranged on, with the mad laughter of their would-be rescuer seeming to come from everywhere. And then, as swiftly as it had begun, the miniature war ended. Silence filled the warehouse.

Several seconds passed before two faces peered over the barricade of cases, eyes looking one way, then darting in another direction.

"I see that you and your friend are all right, Doctor!"

Sarah Jane screamed, literally jumping a foot into the air as she and the Doctor whirled about. Her heart was beating like a kettledrum as she beheld the unearthly figure of their savior.

"Are you all right, Miss?" the figure asked, the cold tones he had used when talking to her captors partially gone. Even the unnerving gleam in his eyes seemed to have vanished.

"Oh yes...yes, I'm fine...I always look like this when I've had the living daylights scared out of me!" Sarah gasped as she tried to get a better look at her rescuer.

Her original impression of the strange figure was unchanged, but an additional feature was added. A jewel-like ring gleamed on the finger of one hand. As she peered at the face that looked back at her from beneath the brim of the slouch hat that the figure

wore, Sarah had the feeling that she was looking at a not-quite mirror image of the Doctor, right down to his prominent, formidable nose. But in contrast to the Doctor's fuller, jollier features, the face of the cloaked figure was leaner, thinner and more serious, as if its owner smiled rarely. In fact, only a slight curling of the figure's lips told her that he might be doing just that.

Without thinking, Sarah turned to look at the Doctor's grinning countenance, then back at the face of the other.

"Yes, there is a bit of a resemblance, don't you think?" he said.

"I'm sorry if I startled you, Miss...?" the figure began.

"Smith," the Doctor interjected. Then, going through the motions of a formal introduction, he said, "Sarah Jane Smith, I'd like you to meet the gentleman I was hoping to find at the Cobalt Club..."

"Then you're Lamont Cranston!" Sarah Jane exclaimed, as the cloaked figure bowed slightly towards her. Then, the figure looked at the Doctor in a way that reminded Sarah of the expression the Doctor often assumed when pondering an interesting problem.

"I see things haven't changed with you very much," the figure said. "You still seem to attract trouble wherever you turn up."

"Well, it isn't my fault that I was mistaken for you by those ruffians!" the Doctor protested. "I can't help it if we happen to have more than a passing resemblance."

"I think perhaps we should continue this conversation in a more congenial atmosphere..." the figure began.

"Such as the Cobalt Club, perhaps?" Sarah Jane suggested.

With an almost theatrical flourish, the figure swept the slouch hat from his head, revealing that his resemblance of the Doctor did not extend to his hairline. Instead of a duplicate of the Doctor's wild curly hair, their rescuer's hair was well-groomed in the appropriate fashion of the times. Another flourish and the flowing cloak-like garment was now draped like an overcoat across the arm of a man in evening dress who looked the part of a society figure about to go out on the town. Even the expression about the eyes and the face seemed to undergo a change, causing the observer to think that he was looking at the face of a slightly bored, indolent individual.

"What a marvelous idea, Miss Smith," the figure of Lamont Cranston drawled. "The Cobalt Club it is. Shall we go?"

* * * * * * *

"You know, I think I could get used to a lifestyle like this," Sarah sighed as she settled into the plush comfort of the limousine's upholstered back seat. The Doctor, sitting to one side of the girl, riposted in an almost-perfect imitation of Cranston's languid tones, "Yes, it can become rather habit-forming. But sometimes soooo boring."

A quiet laugh echoed in the back of the car. A laugh of mirth, yet tinged with an undertone of the laugh that had filled the warehouse earlier.

For a moment, Sarah Jane stared at the supposedly languid figure on her right before saying, "You know, I always thought you were just a...a..."

"A myth, Miss Smith?" Cranston said quietly.

"Well, yes! You know, something that you read about in the old thriller adventure magazines and the like."

"It was partly intended to be that way," the figure said. "I was fortunate to enlist an excellent writer in my cause. Like others in my organization, he is more than he appears to be...as we all are...wouldn't you agree, Doctor?"

"Oh, quite so, my dear Cranston," the Doctor replied. "But tell me, just for my own edification, your coming to the rescue wasn't quite accidental, was it?"

"At first it was. I arrived at the Cobalt Club a few minutes after the both of you had been and gone. I learned what had happened from Commissioner Weston and the concierge."

"And, naturally, your well-oiled network of agents went into action," the Doctor added.

"Well, actually..." Cranston started to reply, a slightly embarrassed tone in his voice.

"You mean the all-knowing Shadow **didn't know** this time!" the Doctor exclaimed, a needling tone in his voice.

For a moment, a silence as thick as fog hung over the rear of the limousine. Sarah saw Cranston's features tighten into a mask-like expression that indicated an attempt at self-control.

"No, Doctor," he said in a clipped tone that made Sarah suspect that their rescuer was gritting his teeth. "I didn't...until one of my agents contacted me. He happened to be in the vicinity of the Cobalt Club, since I was going to be there a little later on. It was standard procedure. I understand that he managed to trail your friend's kidnappers quite efficiently."

"With a little help from my homing device...I thought that cabbie looked <u>familiar</u>!" the Doctor exclaimed, eyes wide.

"Moe Shrevnitz is probably one of the finest drivers in the city," Cranston said, the all-knowing tone returning to his voice. "That's why he works exclusively for me. As soon as he dropped you off, he contacted headquarters....and the rest you know."

"Well, I think it would be more appropriate to say that The Shadow knows!" Sarah Jane suddenly quipped.

The Doctor groaned...

...and the sound of eerie, yet mirth-filled laughter echoed through the New York City night like a trail left in the wake of the limousine's passing.

To the memory of Walter Gibson, a.k.a. "Maxwell Grant", who guided us through the Shadows of mystery and adventure.

MEMORIES
by Melissa Mastoris

You deserve to be left there,
I say to myself.
Justice should be given out
For what you've done to Castrovalva.

But hearing your screams
Sends chills down my spine,
Because I can remember a time
When we weren't such bitter enemies

There was a time
When I'd beg for a little attention.
My eyes shining with adoration,
As I followed you everywhere.

And I shudder to think
Of what you've become.
There was so much good in you once.
Where did it all go?

Twisted creature of evil;
You're no brother of mine.
I'd rather say he was dead,
Then say I'm related to you.

I refuse to admit
That we share the same blood.
Don't force me to recall,
What I've tried so hard to forget.

But your screams rake at my mind,
Dragging me back through time,
And I can't fight the memory
That we were once friends.

And although it's too late to help you,
Somehow I still wish I could.
For the sake of my memories,
I hope you've found peace at last.

CLEANING UP AFTER GILBERT

by Lisa Savignano

art by Betty "Cupernicus" Cunningham

In one of the sitting rooms of the Banzai Institute, a TV announcer was describing the effect of Hurricane Gilbert on the tiny island of Jamaica.

"There is no electricity, except in isolated areas of Kingston. There is no fresh water to be had, and no food except for what the other governments have airlifted in. Over 80% of the houses have been destroyed, leaving thousands homeless."

"The death toll now numbers..." There was a click as the TV was turned off, and the intern known as Electric Blue finished winding up her braid and sighed. "We're coming, Maritta."

* * * * * * *

The inside of the plane was cramped, but immaculately clean. Most of the space inside was taken up by twenty Blue Blaze volunteers. The rest of the plane and its cargo space were taken up by food, water, medical supplies, and building materials.

Leading the mission to Jamaica were Perfect Tommy and Reno. The complement of Blue Blazers were as good a team as they could hope for. Three, Enchantress, Sunchild, and Moonchild, were all engineers. Their expertise in construction would be useful.

There were also four Blue Blazers skilled in Medicine. One was a doctor, one a nurse, and the other two were still in Medical school, but all four of them, Beautiful Dreamer, Big Bear, Halo, and Sunspot, had worked together as team before.

Two of the remaining eleven Blue Blazers were agriculture specialists. They were here to judge how soon the fields could produce food again. Then, they would give the farmers seed and show them the most efficient way to plant for the next harvest.

The remaining nine Blue Blazers were general help. They would be the ones wielding the hammers, lifting the timber and toting most of the equipment.

Perfect Tommy climbed into the plane and glanced at Starbuck, the pilot. "Are we cleared for takeoff?"

Starbuck, without once looking up from his instruments, drawled "Ay-yuh."

"Good." Tommy pulled the doors closed behind him and locked it tight. The slow drone of the engines grew into a muted roar, and the plane started to taxi down the runway. Tommy made his way to the back of the plane where the other Blue Blazers were.

"Attention, this is your pilot speaking," said Starbuck in his New England drawl. "Please buckle yourselves in, and extinguish all smoking materials. Take off is in five minutes."

As soon as he stepped into the passenger area, Perfect Tommy was subjected to good-natured ribbing. "MY GOD! Perfect Tommy owns jeans!" crowed Moonchild.

When the wolf-whistles died down, Electric Blue gave him a thorough once over. "Dressing down to the level of the rest of us mortals, Mister Perfection?"

"Heck no! It's perfectly right for the occasion !" he replied, with a smile at the chorus of groans. The next thing he knew, he was the target of eighteen pillows aimed at him. He tried to duck, but was hit before he could move.

There was a slight bump as the plane took off, and everyone settled in for the flight.

Across the tiny cabin, Electric Blue looked out the window and bit her lip. She worried it back and forth in between even rows of white teeth. "A quick death, or a slow one," she muttered under her breath.

"What was that?" asked Big Bear.

"Oh, nothing," she said, startled. "I was just worried about a friend who's on the island."

"A Blue Blazer?"

"Pen Pal," she replied softly.

"Don't worry, I'm sure we'll find her," he said.

"Yeah," she said dispiritedly, going back to looking out the window.

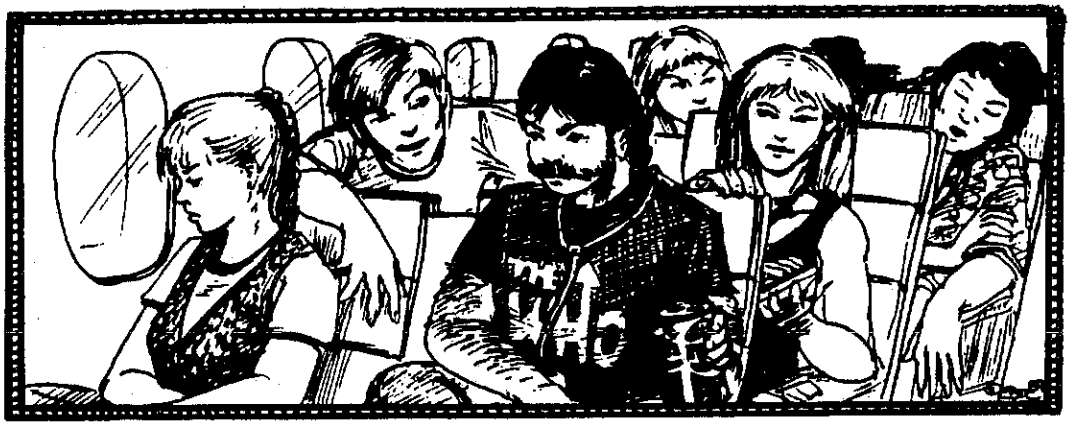
A few seats away, Halo and Serifan were playing chess. "Knight to King's 4," said Halo, her golden hair absolutely still as she contemplated the board.

Serifan's brown head was also still, but his eyes moved as he considered several pieces. "Bishop to Queen 3. Check."

"Damn," Halo said. "Are you sure this is the second time you've played the game?"

He grinned in reply, and began setting up pieces for the next game. "I think I'm going to like rescue work," he said. "No shooting people, no fighting, no violence. Only pure and simple building and treating the wounded."

"Well, it also sounds a bit boring," Halo replied. "Give me high adventure any day and you'll have yourself an intern."



"Adventure is okay, but there tends to be a lot of shooting during adventure."

"Well, I have every intention of keeping my hide intact!" she said with a laugh.

The speaker blared. "We will be landing in twenty minutes," said Starbuck's New England drawl. "Just thought I'd warn ya."

"Well," said Serifan, "We'd better be getting ready." He clinked his soda can against hers. "Here's to Jamaica."

She smiled and clinked the cans again. "To Jamaica!"

* * * * * * *

Electric Blue thought the most horrifying thing about the aftermath of the storm was the smell of the island. Everywhere, fish had been thrown up onto land, and, with none to remove them, they began to rot and stink. The island smelled of death, death and destruction.

Everywhere they went, they could see where Gilbert had touched. The runway had been cleaned, but the rest of the airport was still a wreck. A small boat had been tossed through the terminal building, and shards of glass lay all over.

Outside the airport, houses had been toppled like playing cards. Bits and pieces lay scattered far and wide over the streets. On a small rise, a woman sat on a wobbly rocking chair in front of her house. Only the frame was left, standing like a naked mannequin against the sky.

But here there were already signs of new construction. New buildings stood out like lonely flowers on a rocky plain. People residing in them didn't look as shell-shocked as the others, or perhaps only less so.

They passed the buildings by. The interior was where the devastation was the worst, and that was where they were headed. The road out of the city was clear, and as they began to rise, they could see where trees had been pulled out of the way, and lay by the road like dead men, the cracked, splintered trunks good only for firewood now.

"I thought nobody had come out this way, Reno," said Vixen. Vixen was an American Indian known for fierceness and hatred for people who acted superior to others. She watched the side of the road with a keen trackers eye.

"The government has been trying to get food into the interior," said Reno. "They probably got through just recently."

"Oh," said Vixen. "So, where's this village your pen pal lives, Electric Blue?"

"It's called Ewarton," Blue said, rapidly warming to the subject. "She lives there with her family. It's almost in the middle of the highlands." Her face was wistful as she murmured. "I hope she's okay."

* * * * * * *

It took only a few hours to reach the highlands with the trucks. The trucks had been provided by the government. They were army personnel carriers, adapted to carry both supplies and building materials.

They were just outside the village of Ewarton. Reno, Vixen and Electric Blue were in the lead truck. She had insisted on being in the first truck and was constantly craning her head out the passenger side window, as if by moving her head, she could somehow get them there faster.

The road to the village was long and winding, curling up into the hills. The vegetation was sparse, and made even sparser by the hurricane's devastation.

About a mile from the village, they saw a man with a gun guarding the road. He waved for them to stop, and Electric Blue dismounted from her seat and went to talk to him.

"You cannot be comin' this way," he said, in a rolling Jamaican accent.

"We are bringing food to the village of Ewarton," she said, looking into his dark eyes. "We are not looters."

The dark man leaned the bore of his rifle on the ground and put both hands on the barrel. His black eyes were unreadable. "You not be comin' in," he said stubbornly.

"Why?" Electric Blue asked, frustrated.

The man glared at her and suddenly whipped his rifle up and slammed the butt into her face. She spun away, but not in time to avoid being hit. The butt slammed into her jaw, and it felt like half her face was being torn off.

She was thrown back and landed on her side in the gravel to one side of the road. She rolled over and tried to get up, but the man kicked her in the ribs with a smile.

Pain ripped through her, and she could barely breathe. She tried to drag herself away, and the man drew back his foot for another blow.

Perfect Tommy came around the first truck to see why they had stopped. He saw Electric Blue get knocked back by the gun butt.

Reno literally threw himself out of the truck. He started to run towards where Electric Blue was, and was matched step for step by Perfect Tommy and Vixen.

The man smiled as he kicked Electric Blue again. She fell over and stopped trying to move, curling up into a ball to protect the more vital parts of her anatomy.

"Animal!" Vixen snarled. Her buckskins were soiled with the dust of the road, but the blade of her Bowie knife was a shining silver spark in the sunlight. Her Navaho blood was pulsing strongly through her veins as she leapt at the man.

He put all his power into a blow that connected to her jaw. She felt the pop, and tucked into a roll as she was sent sprawling to the ground. The man's blood glimmered wetly on the sharp edge of her knife, but it was only a flesh wound.

Perfect Tommy hit the man's face with all of his anger and accumulated velocity behind his fist. The man collapsed backwards, hitting the ground with a loud thump, and then twisted in pain as a large rock thumped into his shoulder.

By this time, Reno had drawn his gun and was standing over the man, daring him to make a move. The man wisely kept still as Perfect Tommy helped the two women to stand.

Vixen seemed a bit dazed. She clutched her jaw firmly, as if she were afraid it would fall off, and began walking back to the truck. She went back to find Big Bear, the doctor.

"You alright, Blue?" Perfect Tommy asked. She tried to speak, but couldn't, and nodded instead. "What happened?" he demanded.

"I don't..know," she gasped. "I asked..why we couldn't..go on..and he hit me." The side of her face was already beginning to darken into a bruise, and she continued to gasp for breath. "Bastard," she ended with as much heat as she could muster.

"Tommy," said Reno. "Frisk him. Let's see who this character is."

A quick search revealed nothing incriminating, in fact, no personal effects at all.

The man spat at Reno, missing his shoe by less than an inch. His muscles moved convulsively under his patched cotton shirt. He glared at Reno, who met his eyes cooly in reply.

"Don't try it," Reno warned him. "I don't like people who beat up on women. I like people who beat up my friends even less." He stooped to the level of the man. "Now, who are you?"

The man just glared at him, making no move to reply for long moments. "You never be findin' out," he sneered. "You is nothing."

Vixen came back, moving her jaw experimentally, and bearing a coil of heavy duty steel wire cored rope. "Want me to tie him up?" she asked. "I'll do a <u>real</u> good job."

"Be my guest," Reno said. Vixen smiled coldly and went to work. She tied him so that if he tried to move his hands too far, he would strangle himself. The same for his legs. He was unequivocally trussed. The steel wire inside could not be worn away, like the rope fibers.

"Who do you think this guy is?" asked Tommy.

"I don't know, but it must have something to do with the town. We had better warn the others to expect trouble."

The other Blue Blazers listened with more or less rapt looks. When Reno finished, Sunchild chuckled. "Guess it's time to shine up the bat." Her face widened into a broad grin. Her bat was everything to her and she managed to bring it everywhere with her.

"Speak for yourself," said Moonchild, her non-identical triplet sister. "Starchild didn't bring his bow, and I don't have my foil. How are we going to fight?"

"You should have thought of that before you came," replied Sunchild smugly.

"I'm not sure what we'll find exactly, but I'm sure it isn't going to be good," Reno warned. "Be on your toes."

Reno scanned the group one last time. "Okay," he said. "here's how we'll work it.."

* * * * * * *

The village was almost totally destroyed. There were only about eight houses left standing, and all of them were in poor shape. A few starved-looking children played listlessly in the nearly empty streets, arranging bits of wood into oblique patterns in the dust.

Off to one side, there was a big truck pulled up near the town square. There were some men near it, handing out a few meager blankets and some food. One man, bigger than the others, watched the men handing out the supplies.

"I don't get it," Electric Blue said. "Why would someone try to prevent us from coming into the village if they are already handing out food and blankets?"

"I don't get it either," Reno replied, sounding just as confused as she felt. "Why don't we ask and get the whole story?"

They pulled up in the center of town, and watched as the people swarmed eagerly about

the truck. Perhaps it was just a trick of the light, but to them, the villagers looked angry.

Reno stepped out of the truck, and ducked as a rock narrowly missed his head. A variety of missles thudded after it, a shoe, some more rocks, and a few dead animals.

"Get out of here!" an old man cried. "We don't need anymore blood suckers like you. We already got a whole truckful of them."

"But we're here to give you the food and water," Electric Blue protested. "We're from the Banzai Institute."

"Dey lie," said someone from the back. Electric Blue looked up to see a tall, weasel-faced black man with his arms over his chest looking at them. He didn't look as though he belonged with the rest of the villagers, even though he shared their manner of dress. It took her a second longer to notice that this man was well-fed and in good condition, in contrast to the malnourished villagers.

"Dey ain't from the Banzai Institute. That place be too busy with it's good causes to pay any attention to you people. Dey's probably gonna set up a racket here too."

"And who are you just to say what the Banzai Institute is or isn't?" Moonchild said angrily. "The institute is concerned with making the world better, and that includes people."

"I be Baron Samedi, and I be the law in this village. You had better be going now. We don' want you and your stupid American tricks here."

"Just what is going on here?" Big Bear thundered. Everybody quit talking as he stepped out of the truck he was driving. Even the man calling himself. "Baron Samedi" appeared intimidated by Bear's near seven-foot height.

Big Bear looked down at everybody. "One person at a time, please. Just tell me what's going on here."

Baron Samedi spoke first. "I tell ya what be goin' on. We had dis village first. You trying to horn in on our business, mon." He looked up at the tall, muscular Blue Blazer. "Go find youself another village. This one is taken."

The old man who had spoken before now piped up. "If you're here to sell us supplies, you're out of luck. We haven't got any more money."

"Sell them?" Perfect Tommy echoed in amazement. "We're here to give them to you. We're just trying to help the government out a little."

"You mean the government is going to <u>give</u> us supplies?" the old man asked.

Baron Samedi snapped his fingers, and suddenly, five hugely muscular men appeared out of nowhere. "Dey lie," he insisted. "I is the only game in town, and you have to buy from <u>me</u>."

"Not if we have anything to say about it," Reno replied firmly.

A spark of anger flared in Baron Samedi's eyes. "Get dem," he said. "Make dem pay."

The five men started forward, parting the crowd like water. They stopped just in front of the Blue Blazers, and one of them smiled, revealing dirty, rotted teeth. Then, he swung at Reno.

Reno ducked, and made a quick jab to the man's jaw. The man's head didn't move, and he smiled again. Reno felt a distinct sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. "Uh oh," he murmurred.

With the one man's attack on Reno, all the others had begun to fight. Big Bear was going at it toe to toe with the largest one, and the others were being ganged up on by the other Blue Blazers. Perfect Tommy, in particular spent a lot of time ducking the wild swings of his opponent, and making devastating attacks with apparently nonchalant ease.

The crowd watched the proceedings with interest, and the sort of attention seen at sporting events, crowing over certain attacks and near misses. The man calling himself Baron Samedi watched with a distinct feeling of uneasiness. His men should have finished with the interlopers by now. He gestured, and one of his toadies appeared, seemingly out of thin air. "Get de others. We gotta show dem whose de law in dis town."

The man nodded, and sprinted for the other truck, while Baron Samedi returned his attention to the ongoing fight.

Electric Blue kicked the man in the kidneys once again, and felt a certain amount of satisfaction as he clutched at his back, leading the way for Reno's roundhouse punch, which finally downed the man. He sagged to the dirt, and stayed there.

Reno wiped the sweat from his brow. "Good work," he said.

She nodded. "You, too."

Reno looked up. "Shit," he said, under his breath.

Electric Blue looked up, and saw what he had seen. Ten men were coming towards them, and they did not look friendly. "Oh boy," she said, covering her eyes and wishing that this was all an illusion. It didn't work.

The crowd watching the fight saw what was happening, and changed it's mood quickly. Murmurs of. "Unfair" drifted around, followed by. "Not right" and. "they were winning, too". Suddenly, the men in the crowd started swinging, albeit with more enthusiasm than skill.

As the last of the original men in the fight fell, the Blue Blazers surged into the crowd, helping the villagers defeat the other men.

Baron Samedi, unnoticed in the fray, slipped out of the village. He took one last glance at the fight in the center of town, got into his jeep, and roared away.

* * * * * * *

The men had been carted away and driven out to a place far away enough from the town that it would be easier to walk back to Kingston. They were told to stay away, with a handgun exclamation point, and their truck had been confiscated, along with the goods in it. The people needed it more than Baron Samedi and his men. The crowd was still where they had been a few hours ago, and looked expectantly at the Blue Blazers. Electric Blue stepped forward, her hands spread.

"Is Maritta Albo here?"

"I be Maritta Albo." A woman stepped forward, sporting a large black eye. She wore a ragged dress in some muddy color, and her long black hair was tied back with a strip of what appeared to be the same material.

"Maritta, I'm Electric Blue."

"Rohana!" the woman ran forward to embrace Electric Blue. "I knew you weren't going to forget us!" she said, smiling. "What happen to your face? You look awful!"

"Oh, nothing. Now, let's see about getting some food to your people."

The people shook all the Blue Blazer's hands as the food was handed out. Meanwhile, the construction experts, Moonchild, Sunchild, and Enchantress, were setting out the materials and starting construction of some simple houses.

The condition of the other homes was pitiful. The few houses left standing were sheltering seven to ten people in one room. All of the houses needed drastic repair, and they decided to demolish the houses and then rebuild them, after they had built other houses.

The food situation was more desperate. The people had had no food since the storm left the island five days ago. The few provisions not destroyed by the storm had been eaten up in the first day. The prices the black marketeers had been charging were exorbitant, and almost nobody could afford to pay them.

Fresh water was nowhere to be had, except for what the government brought in on the plane, and what the Institute had brought with them. People were happy to get the food, but even more happy to get the water.

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"I'm so glad you finally got here," said Maritta, as she beat her dress with a rock against another rock. The water in the tub was already dirty, but clean clothes were just as important to her as clean drinking water. "We were so desperate for help, and then dose leeches arrived," she said, a hint of scorn in her voice.

"It got really bad then?" asked Electric Blue, a sort of fascination in her voice.

"Yah," said Maritta softly. "Real bad. Old Akumbie was near to kicking the bucket before the hurricane. No food woulda killed him off certain."

Electric Blue could feel a heavy tightness in her chest. "Excuse me," she murmured, turning and running away before the tears could overwhelm her.

She ran, not even bothering to wipe her eyes, until she bumped into something. "Electric Blue, are you all right?" asked Perfect Tommy. "Oh, you're crying!"

"Yeah," she mumbled. He put his arm around her and drew her away, to where they could be alone.

She wiped her eyes on the arm of her jacket and looked to where the people from the surrounding villages were gathered for the food. He noticed where her eyes were. "It was horrible, wasn't it?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, wiping her eyes again. Her shoulders shook. "I'm just sad we can't do more for these people."

"I know, I'm sad too."

She looked up at him and smiled hesitantly. He gently lifted her chin with a finger and looked into her eyes. "That's not all this is about, isn't it?" He had been largely untouched by the fight. His face was unblemished, but his knuckles were bandaged.

She pulled her head away and looked at the ground. "Everyone is so polite! I just can't take it anymore. I feel like I'm responsible somehow."

"Stop that!" he commanded. Her eyes snapped back to him, questioning. "You aren't responsible. Hurricane Gilbert is to blame. You can't be responsible for what it did. Are you responsible for everything that goes wrong in the world?"

He sometimes wished Electric Blue wasn't so "Mother" like. If something went wrong, she felt it was her fault. It was hard for her to see it wasn't.

But heck, he thought, she must have thought it was her fault when her parents died. She said she had had an argument with them before they left. Poor girl, going through life blaming herself for everything. Her ego must have been almost nil.

Then, she smiled openly. "You're right," she conceded. "thanks, teach." She walked off back where she had come.

He watched her go with a smile, and then went back to work."

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The next morning, Electric Blue got up to watch the sun rise. Today, she would be helping the construction crew build sturdy little houses for the people of Ewarton.

Now, however, she was enjoying the sight of the sun rising over the hills. She rose and stretched, then slipped away to dress. The air was clean and clear, with no clouds on the horizon. She spent time looking at the sky, marveling at the myriad colors, ranging from the palest hints of eggshell to the deep blue of a topaz.

When she returned, eggs were going on the frying pan. Beautiful Dreamer and her husband Big Bear were making breakfast. Most of the others were still asleep, and a few were getting up to dress. The scent of cooking food wafted through the camp, and her stomach growled.

Beautiful Dreamer looked up. "Good morning, Blue," she said. Her blonde hair was up in a bun and her brown eyes went immediately back to the eggs. "I thought I sensed you."

Beautiful Dreamer's husband, Big Bear, was trying to toast bread over the fire. Several burned pieces attested to earlier failures. "Good Morning, Dreamy, Bear."

"Expect trouble today," said Beautiful Dreamer off-handedly.

"One of your. "flashes"?" asked Big Bear. Her dreams had been proved right too often to ignore.

She nodded, and Electric Blue asked. "What kind and how much?"

"Not too big," Dreamy said placidly. "Beyond that, I don't know."

"Well thanks for the warning," Big Bear said, and groaned as smoke began to rise from the piece of bread he was toasting. He cursed softly and sat looking at the results of his labors.

"I'd prefer mine a little less well done," said Electric Blue with an impish smile.

He grinned at her, and said. "Ah, well, forget it."

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Later that day, as Electric Blue was helping nail up a wall, there came the sound of jeeps from the road leading into town. Remembering Beautiful Dreamer's warning, she grabbed for her gun, but was seized from behind.

Her arms were twisted cruelly, and she cried out in pain. All around her, the Blue Blazers were being overcome by men swarming into the village. Her arms were tied with rough rope, and she was pushed into the center of the village with the rest of the Blue Blazers.

Some bore marks and bruises, but all were there. Her heart sank. Now, they were helpless for whatever the men planned for them.

A jeep came into sight, with only two men in it. One was a face she remembered only too well from the fight, Baron Samedi, and the other was of a much darker, more muscular man who was driving. The man who called himself Baron Samedi was carrying a large, double-barrelled shotgun. The man driving the jeep appeared to carry no weapons, but since she couldn't see the lower half of his body because he was driving the jeep, she couldn't be sure.

The Jeep came to a stop in the center of the village. Baron Samedi leapt out and ran his eyes over the assembled group. "Don't move," he warned them. "Dis is a very special shotgun. It's primed to blow both barrels, and has a hair trigger. You 'ad better answer my questions, or I'll get angry. When I gets angry, my trigger finger 'as a tendency to tighten. Ya get my meaning?"

He looked them over. "A course you do. You is good." He laughed mirthlessly. "Now, for de first question. Who is your leader?"

"Who are you, asshole?" cried Moonchild. "I mean your real name. You should at least let us know what name to put on <u>your</u> gravestone." She spat into the dirt contemptuously.

The Baron laughed. "Dat be very good, girl. I like a woman with spirit!" He laughed again. "I like you. You wants ta know my real name. Okay, my real name is death, and I'll be de death of you." He laughed uproariously at his own joke.

"Yeah, yeah," Moonchild seemed unimpressed. "But do you know how long it takes someone to die of boredom? I'm well on my way, I'll admit, but consider taking a year of absence or two. Then you can do it right and in style."

Baron Samedi stopped laughing. He stared at her, and then walked over to her. He stared into her eyes, and then turned away. Moonchild relaxed, and at precisely that moment, he turned around and hit her, hard across one cheek, knocking her about like a rag doll.

"You'll have to try harder than that, horse-breath!" Moonchild crowed heartily.

Baron Samedi jammed the gun in her stomach, and Moonchild's next words died unspoken on her lips. "Don't be pushin' me!" he warned, foam flecking the corners of his mouth. She stared at him wordlessly, waiting for the slight jerk which would mean the end of her life.

It never came. Baron Samedi pulled the gun away and smiled at her. "Be good," he said, caressing her cheek. She tried to pull away, and he let her. "Who be your leader?" he asked, calmly.

There was no reply. He stared at all of them for a little while, and smiled. He went over to Halo, and, grabbing her roughly under the chin, looked directly into her eyes. "She'll do." he said. "Bring 'er to me."

The men holding her dragged her stubbornly resisting body forward relentlessly. She was pulled to within a few feet of The Baron, and then they stopped. He cupped one of her breasts in his left hand. "Pretty, ain't she?" he asked, as she tried to twist away from him. "It's been a long, hard trip for me boys, and I wouldn't deny them their fun. Would I, boys?" He grinned. "I won't either, iffen you don't tell me who yer leader be."

Halo stood with her eyes closed, obviously afraid, but trying not to show it.

The Baron looked around at the Blue Blazers, who were shifting uneasily from foot to foot and looking at each other. He smiled evilly. "I'se such a reasonable man."

"Oh, yes, so reasonable," snapped Moonchild.

"Two women hold up better dan one," the Baron returned sweetly.

She fell silent, and still there was no reply. "Amazin'," the Baron said. "You let girl be used by my boys rather dan talk? An' dey call me heartless!" He looked at the two men who held her. "You two hold her, I go first."

"Wait!" Electric Blue called out. "I'll tell you." Tears were leaking from the corners of her eyes. "I'm the leader," she said, in a guilty tone.

The Baron's lip curled in a contemptuous sneer. "You, woman, are de leader? I don' believe you."

"Believe what you like, I am the leader," she said, not mentioning the fact that half of the Blue Blazers would have to be dead or incapacitated before that came to pass.

"Good," he said with a smile. "You die first." He put the shotgun in the jeep and pulled out a pistol aimed it at her. She closed her eyes and moved her lips in a silent prayer.

"Stop!" someone shouted.

The Baron snapped around. "Huh?"

Ringing the group of black marketeers was yet another group:the people of the Village of Ewarton, and some people dressed in Buckaroo Banzai T-shirts. A tall woman was calmly holding a gun on the Baron. "Drop it," she said sweetly.

He dropped the gun. She smiled and said. "Good. Now order your men to surrender."

"Boys," he said, in a voice that was strained. He paused. "Attack!"

With the added distraction, the captive Blue Blazers were able to free themselves quickly. The black marketeers were caught in the claws of a pincer movement, and began to be quickly overwhelmed.

Baron Samedi, seeing his men fall, started to dart away again. This time, Electric Blue was watching him carefully. "Oh no you don't!" she cried, reaching out and grabbing his shirt. She yanked back on it, and he began to be pulled slowly back towards her.

Suddenly, he wheeled around and puched her in the jaw. She grunted in pain, and countered with a quick kick to the solar plexus. He partially blocked it, but with even only some of the force behind the blow, he winced.

He dropped to the ground and kicked out at her, just missing the knee he had been aiming at. She retreated. "Get up," she said.

"What?" he asked.

"Get up," she said, enunciating the words clearly. "I won't fight you on the ground, so get up." Her eyes were spitting with barely supressed anger, and he knew she meant it.

"What happens iffen I don't get up?" he asked lazily.

"You'll just have to find that out, won't you?" she said with a short laugh.

He quickly got up from the ground, and she punched him in the eye. Not with a ladylike punch either. All her power and anger was behind that punch. He found himself sprawled on the ground again.

This time, he kicked her legs out from under her. She fell, but managed to twist her body away from any major damage. He knelt above her, and punched her in the stomach.

She curled up in pain, and her body spasmed. Both her legs rose up in the air, and she was supported by her shoulderblades. Then, her legs came together stiffly and dropped.

Almost before he knew it, her upper body was coming up as her legs dropped, and she punched him in the face again. One of her rings split the flesh over his cheekbone, and he howled in pain. He punched Electric Blue in the face three times in rapid succession, and she fell back to the ground.

"How dare you do that to my friend!" somebody shouted, and Baron Samedi was kicked in the side by a strong right leg. He was knocked to one side, and he glanced up to see one of the women from the village standing over him, his gun pointed towards him.

"Stand up, you slime," the woman instructed, targeting the gun on his chest.

"All right," he answered, holding up his hands, and making a painful ascent. "Don't ya think you better see to yer friend, though?"

The woman's eyes flickered over to Electric Blue's still form, and in that moment, he grabbed the barrel of the gun. Her grip was stronger than he thought, though, and for long minutes he battled her for posession of the gun.

Finally, he got it away from her. "Prepare to die!" he said with glee.

"Oh no you don't!" came a shout from behind him. Electric Blue coshed him with a piece of rock, aiming just behind his ear. He went down with a grunt, falling to the ground with a soft sound.

Both women stood staring at him for a few minutes, panting heavily. Finally, Maritta ventured to speak. "We did good, didn't we?"

Electric Blue nodded. "Yeah, we did good. Put 'er there, Pard."

"Okay!" They solemnly shook hands and returned to the center of the village, dragging the body of Baron Samedi.

They were in the infirmary together, studying their collection of bruises in a mirror. Maritta had a black eye, a set of split knuckles, and an assortment of various cuts and bruises over her face and body.

Electric Blue had two black eyes, one of them so bad it had closed completely, cuts and bruises, and a nagging pain in her lower back from a bruised tailbone. "I look worse!"

"No, I do!" Maritta returned.

They both laughed, and Electric Blue said. "We look a right pair, don't we?"

"Yeah," Maritta agreed, putting down the mirror. She was silent for a few moments. "Rohana, I've been meanin' to ask you. Why did you run away from me the other day?"

"Oh." Electric Blue was silent for a few moments, and then she said. "I was ashamed. I thought that if we had gotten here sooner, we might have alleviated some of the suffering your village went through."

"I don' understand all dose big words," Maritta said. "But yer heart was in de right place. We don' hold no grudge against you for not comin' sooner. Dose people needed to be taken down a peg or two anyway."

"Yeah," Electric Blue said, allowing herself to be comforted by the other woman's words. Her words became wistful. "It was sort of fun, wasn't it?"

"You got it," Maritta agreed. She looked out the front door. "They's puttin' up another building. Wanna go help? I'll race you."

"You're on!"

MY SHADOW FRIEND
by Jan Grokett

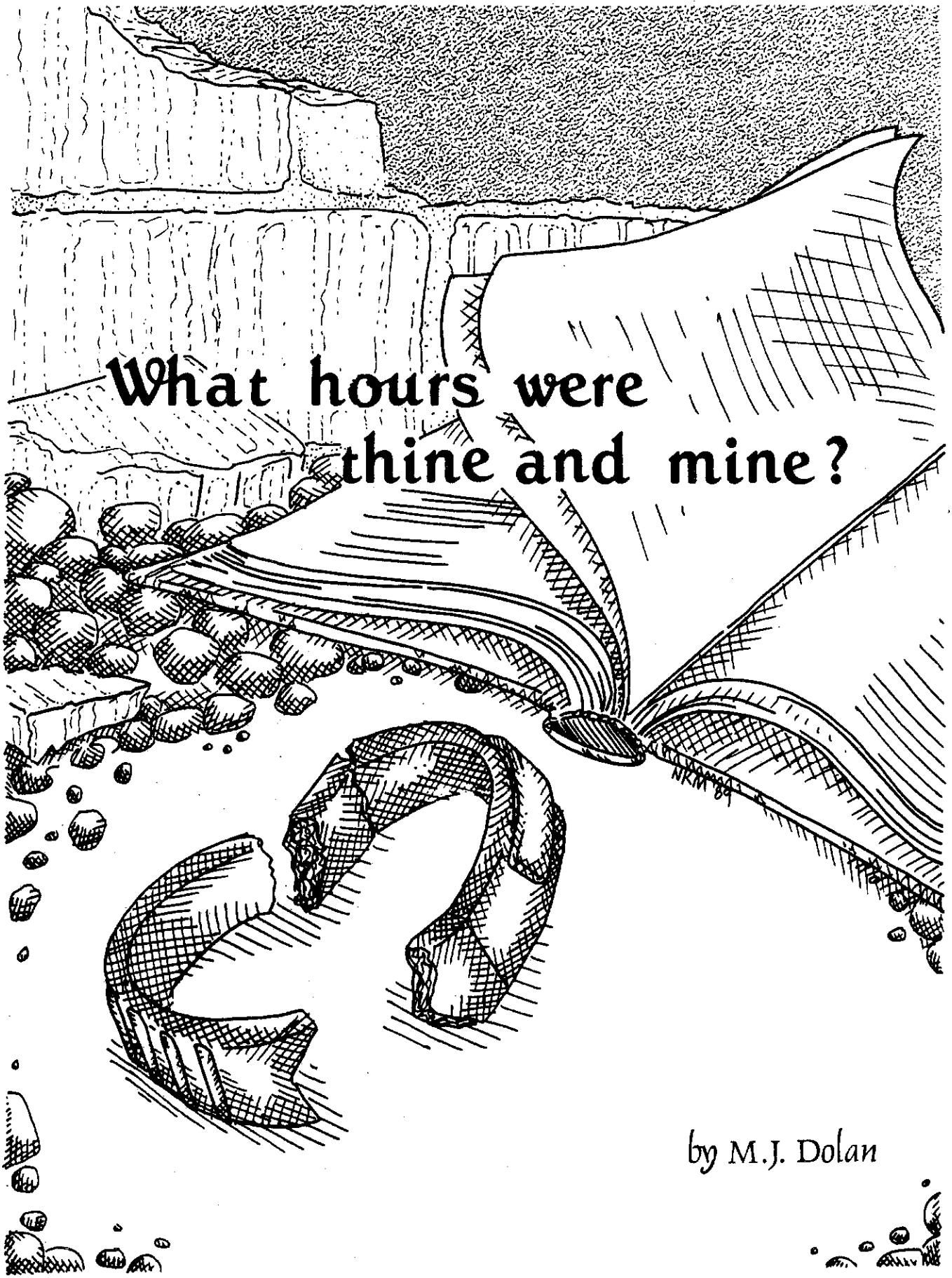
Servalan, my dark beauty,
You are a sensuous wraith
torn from my shadowed abyss.
I can feel your tentacles ripping
away my icy barriers.

I am drawn and yet repelled
by your wanton sexuality.
Passionate desires bring
betrayal and death.

Death is the compensation
for the ones we love.
Anna and Cally have felt
the sting of a scorpion's
tail.

Our only reward for passion
is the dark abyss that
ensnares us.
I no longer have the strength
to face the light.

How can I retreat from you
my shadow friend!
I have denied your seductive
power far too long.
Come and end my pain.


What hours were
thine and mine?
by M.J. Dolan

Thira's last rays broke through banks of glowering clouds that had made this Garian day dark and gloomy. It had been a relatively normal day--neither excessively good or memorably bad. Although day was certainly more of the former than the latter, for it was almost twilight and Kouri Eiment was still alive.

She had expected much worse when she woke to an early harbinger of the monsoon season. There had been no roof to the shelter she had chosen last night, and the food she had held back from yesterday for today's breakfast was soaked beyond consumption. Her stomach rumbling, the girl had wrung the cold water from her tattered clothes before going up west to the Labor Exchange. But there, the few jobs available had gone to burly types who might have been genetically engineered to be stevedores. Her protests that she was stronger than she appeared went unheard.

She had then gone to the shopping district, where her offers to sweep the pavement in front of several shops were rebuffed. By mid-day, however, things started going better. Kouri ran an errand for a servant at the Palace and received the hot meal she'd been promised along with, much to her surprise, a two florin tip. The package she had picked up in the spaceport and delivered must have contained drugs, but Kouri couldn't afford to be censorious--even if it was shadow or jazilat, she didn't care, although, she would have preferred knowing beforehand.

Then the good ladies of the Kalivios gave her a clean chandor after only a little sorrowful nagging. They thought her a whore as so many of their clients were and the girl had never told the ladies any different. She didn't consider herself a whore and, in Kouri's mind, that made all the difference. However, she did recognize that it was all a matter of degree. To the chastity-sworn Kalivios, the fact that the girl had ever allowed herself to be used for sex made her a whore. Kouri suffered the lecture in patient silence for the sake of the clothes.

On her labyrinthine way back to the slums, she passed behind a noble mansion and found half a loaf of only slightly moldy bread beside a rubbish can. And, in the food market, a fruit vendor gave her a handful of anaplia for tending his stand while he peed. These would feed her tonight and make a good start on tomorrow's meal. She happily planned to save the florins for a less lucky day.

Her attention was drawn to a group of children, all nobles by their dress and attendants, who were sky-larking outside a school. One of their servants dropped a book but no one in the group noticed. Kouri waited, holding her breath, until the group continued down the street, turned the corner and disappeared from her sight. After making sure that no guards were around, she scurried from her hiding place and swept the book from the street and into the bundle of her old clothes.

She headed for her home district, wasting less than a second's pity for the servant who would undoubtedly pay with pain for his carelessness. Kouri knew better than to run; any guard who saw one of the slum-folk would have been immediately, and all too likely, justifiably suspicious.

Now she only needed a place to sleep. She could have a bed easily enough--if she were willing to take what went along with it. Luan the Innkeep had a standing offer but what she called love-making was rough and hurtful. With a full belly and clean clothes, Kouri didn't need Luan's attentions, not this night, at least.

As darkness fell, the main streets and squares became busier with squads of official and private guards on patrol. These were joined by black-clad troopers from this new group, called the Federation. Kouri kept to the alleys, byres and mews that she knew so well and neatly avoided their attentions.

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Shortlands had once been part of a proud upper middle-class neighborhood. Its deterioration had started in the First Regency War with damage that wasn't repaired afterwards because the occupants were too frightened, too impoverished or too dead. The street was further damaged in the Second Regency War. It was in one of the many bombardments of the slums that Kouri's parents were killed on their way home from her naming registration. Kouri had survived only because, as tradition demanded, she had been in the arms of her commare, who had lagged behind to gossip with an acquaintance. The final blow for Shortlands had been the earthquake that had killed Kouri's commare, her last blood relative when the girl was six.

Now Shortlands was the neighborhood midden. Piles of trash and rotting pieces of cloth that were beyond anyone's use dotted the buckled pavement. Two walls had collapsed towards a sturdier doorframe, forming a perilously balanced pyramid. Kouri waited and listened for the sounds of other folk, sounds that would force her to move on. It was completely silent and she decided it would do.

A dark form moved against an even darker background some twelve meters from her intended bed. Kouri moved cautiously away from the wall and closer to the movement. There didn't seem to be any danger and she'd developed a high degree of expertise in the field.

The lump of black on the rubble was too large to be a rattib which she might have trapped for a meal or two--if it didn't attack her first. Then it moaned and Kouri blinked at the sound. It seemed to be, no, it was a man.

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Blake shifted on the ground. He thought about standing but the mere thought of that effort made his head swim. He settled for moving his arms and legs in sequence and inventorying his other injuries. Aside from a lump on the back of his head, he seemed to be all right. After he knew that he'd live, Blake allowed his mind to review the last things he remembered seeing and hearing.

He was from a ship--the **Liberator**, yes, that was its name. It had been damaged somehow--he wasn't quite certain about this. And he thought someone named Jenna along with the rest of the crew--no, he couldn't yet remember their names--had said they were taking the ship somewhere safe for repair.

He and Avon hadn't been on the ship when it was damaged, although he couldn't remember the reason for their absence. He did remember that they had teleported to Garian. Blake lifted his hand to check the bracelet and found that it was cracked right across the top. He was stranded until the **Liberator** returned--if it returned.

"But where is Avon?" Blake whispered.

His mind drifted back to the scene on the **Liberator**'s flight deck. "The Garian system has just come under the Federation's influence, you know."

"Yes, I know," Avon had snapped. "I'm the one who told you."

Their discussion had continued, as sport match, only with words of mild invective between the two players. Avon and Blake ignored the others who came and went on the flight deck until they had concluded.

It had been one of their rare agreements. It was true that the Garian System had only recently come under Federation control. From past experience, they knew there would be numerous opportunities to exercise their special talents during this period of confusion and shock.

Avon had planned to explore the planet's somewhat less than secure hookups with the Federation's banking computers. Blake would spend his time recruiting rebels.

At this point, Vila had volunteered to join them. "My skills might come in handy, too." But he had quickly retreated before Avon's and Blake's combined scorn that his thievery might be needed on this trip.

Then they had teleported to Garian. While they had stood in the alleyway, whispering the last details of their plan, Jenna's competent voice had interrupted them. "We're under attack," she had said tersely. "Returning fire."

The men's immediate demand for teleport back to the ship had been ignored. With their absence, they did realize that Cally, Jenna, and Vila would be too busy on the flight deck to operate the teleport. Several minutes passed and while they were concerned, they weren't too deeply worried. Few ships could match the Liberator and Jenna's talents.

"It's all right, Blake," Jenna had finally announced. "A little damage but nothing serious. Still, I'd like to take us away for a bit of repairs." Blake remembered now that he had murmured appreciative agreement.

"Just tell them to get back as quickly as possible," Avon had said as he looked around the littered and noisome street. "This isn't my idea of a pleasant place to stay long."

There had been a commotion at the end of the alleyway, and the computer technician had hurried forward. Blake had sensed someone behind him, then felt the splitting impact of a cosh before he could turn and confront his attacker. He was lucky, he supposed, that the mugger hadn't killed him and had left his teleport bracelet, damaged though it was.

The last thing Blake remembered seeing was Avon standing at the end of this alleyway. The computer technician had been surrounded by Federation troopers and was greeting Servalan quite civilly.

Blake nearly regretted the return of his memory, for he had wanted so much to believe that he could trust Avon. Ever since they had met on the prison transport ship, they'd saved each other's lives several times. Blake's heart didn't want to accept what he had seen, but he couldn't easily discount the evidence of his eyes.

Kouri had bunched her slender body at Blake's first movement and prepared herself to launch an attack or flee--whichever seemed more appropriate. However, the man was groaning louder now, and moving very slowly. He seemed to pose no immediate threat. Curiosity overcame her usual caution and she asked, "Are you all right?"

Until she spoke, Blake hadn't realized that he had an audience. Since the individual spoke before attacking, he thought it was safe to struggle to his feet. He swayed for a moment and said, "I'm Blake. Who are you?"

"Never mind who I am," Kouri muttered as he rushed forward to keep Blake from collapsing once again. "We have to get you out of the way before it's full dark and curfew starts."

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The **Liberator** swung into orbit around a methane iceball of a planet that was protected from casual scans by a cloud of meteors. Without the drain of battle computers and weapons systems, the repair circuits were able to cut into full efficiency. Then,

with nothing to do but wait until they were fully mobile, the crew discussed whether Avon and Blake were safe on Garian.

Vila said, in a tone that wickedly imitated Avon's, "Of course, there are three distinct possibilities--as even an idiot should be able to see." He posed at one of the consoles and continued with academic pomposity, "The first--and most likely in my mind--is that someone's already killed them; two, they've already killed each other, or three, they've separated to keep from killing each other."

Jenna looked up from the navigation console where she was manually plotting--just to keep her skills up--the ship's course to Garian. She shook her head and said mildly, "I don't know, Vila. Very few people have called me an idiot and I don't think much of your possibilities." However, her words were half-hearted, for she knew the personalities of the rebel leader and computer technician very well. Vila could, for a change, be right.

As the others had come to expect, Cally played the peacemaker by announcing that she was sure they were all right. She screwed up her face in an expression that was a familiar sight and continued, "I'd feel something otherwise." Her telepathy made her confident, which was something that the other two were completely lacking.

* * * * * *

Servalan was entertaining a guest in her quarters in the Garian Palace complex. The living area was richly decorated with the best the chief-earl's coffers could provide. Both the Supreme Commander and her guest thought the decor garish but recognized the effort to impress.

The two humans sat at the table, having just finished a meal. Her voice only mildly curious, Servalan asked, "I'm still a little surprised that Blake would let you roam about alone. Surely, even arrant idealist that he is, he'd have learned better by now?"

Avon shrugged and sipped the Cypranian liquor. A part of his mind noted the high alcohol content and cloying sweetness. He didn't much care for it but it was something that Vila might have thought worthwhile. "Perhaps he's a slow learner, or," he finally looked up and smiled lazily, "perhaps he trusts me."

In a less august person, the sound Servalan made at his words would have been called a snigger. In the Supreme Commander, however, it was a chuckle. She smiled at his joke and gestured a mutoid guard forward to re-fill their glasses.

Avon's mind was busy with the all-too-reasonable assumption that Blake was probably dead by now. The engineer-turned-rebel certainly hadn't shown any great capacity for discretion at this point. Still, Avon knew he would have to confirm their leader's death before the others would accept it. Personally, he believed he'd done all that could be reasonably expected by preventing Servalan from finding the rebel leader when she showed up so soon after they had teleported to Garian.

The dark-haired woman reached across the table and took Avon's hand. After massaging his palm for a moment, she said softly, "Well, shall we retire?" As usual, her tone was more a command than a request.

Blooay damn, Avon thought. *The woman's insatiable.* After only a day as her 'partner'--so she called him--he was wondering how she found time to do her work. Well, he knew why she had kept him alive this long. He stood, pulled her roughly from the chair, swept her into his arms and headed for the bedroom.

She struggled and began to protest when one of her dainty high-heel slippers fell off on the way. But she fell silent when he muttered coarsely, "We'll get it later!"

At least Avon knew how to get these damnable clothes that Servalan liked so much off without much fuss. In this mood, she became impatient so quickly, yet was angry if he tore her clothes.

Avon stripped himself and lay on top of the woman. It was difficult and not at all his usual style but he managed to remember that she didn't care to waste much time on foreplay. As his hands and lips and groin became busy, his mind spared a few Freudian seconds to speculate about what, in the Supreme Commander's childhood and adolescence, had made her like this.

Avon was grateful that he'd used Servalan's first absence from the room to jury-rig his teleport bracelet into a silent printer circuit. It wouldn't have done to have it start chirping at whatever awkward moment that the **Liberator** chose to return.

Servalan might seem enthralled with him for the moment and convinced that he had deserted Blake. Still, he wouldn't take any bets on her response if she found out that Blake had been here on Garian all the time. And, if she got her hands on them, Avon knew that the rest of the crew would suffer. He certainly didn't enjoy contemplating what she'd do to him under those circumstances.

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Blake's bulk was heavy against Kouri's slenderness as they picked a cautious way across the broken pavement and into the building that the girl's quick eyes and instinct told her was safest. While they struggled up the stairs, Kouri explained why she never slept alone inside. "It's the mardier groups, you see. They lurk in abandoned buildings and prey on any folk careless enough to invite their attentions."

Kouri propped him against the wall and checked behind a few doors until she found a recently abandoned flat. She settled Blake with the bread and anaplia. "And don't move around or make a sound," she instructed as she left to spend her florins.

By the girl's estimate, there was still over an hour before curfew; however, it was dark and dangerous to be out alone. She regretted the necessity for speed, which prevented her from exercising her bargaining skills. Still, she had twelve marks left when she returned to the flat with a liter of fleurwine, a portion of tomei-stew, two candles and a blanket which was a little wider than would be needed for one person to roll up in. Maternally she tucked it around Blake, lit one of the candles, for it was full dark now, and opened the wine.

The bread, fruit and stew disappeared quickly. Kouri was silently dismayed by the man's appetite until she remembered her mid-day meal of roast sword-bird, three servings of fried patami with gravy and kime-milche at the palace. Blake was a big man and it was obviously some time since he'd eaten.

Sipping the wine, they settled back companionably to watch the candlelight flicker on the walls. "You never did tell me your name," Blake reminded the young woman.

"It's Kouri, Kouri Eiment," she replied. "And is 'Blake' your only name? I can tell by your clothes that you aren't a native. Where are you from--and what were you doing in the slums? Visitors usually stay close to the spaceport or the Palace."

Blake waved his hand casually. *It's such a long story,* he thought, then the sight of his cracked teleport bracelet reminded him that there was plenty of time. He talked first about the **Liberator**, then continued with his Alpha childhood, the domes on Earth, his engineering course and his first involvement with rebellion followed by his capture and adjustment.

He had spoken enthusiastically about the **Liberator** and his crew, nostalgically about his early life. His voice became softer and less certain when his story returned to his second attempt at rebellion and the rigged trial. "I was well-controlled by the Federation's conditioning and drug treatments, and had no idea of what was really going on. They--oh, I don't know!--I suppose you could say that they reminded me of what I already knew and I started to remember again so they--well, they took steps to make sure I wouldn't be believed or trusted." His narrative left out any number of specific details that he didn't think were important or that his mind neatly blocked.

Kouri knew she wasn't getting the entire truth but her life had not led her to expect that kind of honesty. She was used to making quick, life-or-death decisions, and had decided that this man was basically good. For the moment, she was happy just to listen to his words that rumbled on about things her mind could barely imagine.

Eventually, Blake stopped talking and demanded to know more about her.

Kouri thought that he would find the story of her life very dull, but told him about the earthquake that had killed her commare and left her, only six years old, alone on the streets. "I wasn't always slum-folk, you know," she said proudly. "We lived in a regular domicile then but," she shrugged her shoulders sadly, "there wasn't any money and, with the wars and all, no one was willing to take on an extra mouth."

She continued with how Persic had taken her in. "He wasn't a bad man," she explained when Blake protested at how she'd been trained with blows and starving in thievery. "Just impatient. He kept me alive and taught me to read and...oh!" she remembered suddenly. "I found a book today!" She pulled it out of the clothes bundle and examined the title and binding. "Sed Terra Est Regina...oh, damn," she was clearly disappointed. "It looks like fiction--and I much prefer the truth. Still, a book's a book."

Blake held out his hand and examined the binding. He was amused and said, "I've read this! When I was, oh, fifteen, perhaps. You'll like it, I think, even if it isn't 'true'. The title means," his voice grew nostalgic, "But Earth Is Queen."

They were yawning now. The wine had a swift effect and it had been an eventful day for both of them. They began preparing to sleep. The flat's aqueduct gave out a trickle of rusty water which they used to wash.

The cold wind that always preceded the monsoon was already whistling through the holes in the walls. Blake lay on the bed with his back to the wall and his head propped up on his arm. He watched as Kouri disappeared into the corridor for a few minutes and returned with an armload of moldy carpet squares that she forced into the largest cracks.

Since Blake was still recovering from the mugging, Kouri was willing to let him have the bed. However, she saw no reason for her suffering the cold hardness of the floor. She told him to move over and was hurt when his response was an immediate and angry "No!"

He might have protested mildly or, worse, agreed to eagerly and quickly but this reaction startled the girl. "Why not?" she asked plaintively. "I'm clean..."

"Clean has nothing to do with it!" Blake began to struggle up. "You can have the bed. I've already taken advantage of your kindness and I won't, I can't.."

"Don't be stupid!" Kouri said as she pushed him back. "You've been hit over the head." Even as she spoke, it was clear in her mind that he thought she had meant what she had thought he might expect. Eavesdropping on conversations in the spaceport area, she'd heard about planets where men and women didn't, but somehow she didn't think that was Blake's problem. Besides, Garian had been settled by people from Earth only two hundred years ago. It wasn't likely that biology had diverged so drastically that quickly.

As casually as she could under the circumstances, she said, "I don't know about where

you're from, but here in the slums, sharing a bed doesn't necessarily mean sex. And if that's what you're worried about, I don't think I'd mind. You seem--"

Blake exploded with rage. "You're not old enough! I was accused once of..well, never mind. Just keep away from me!"

Kouri considered his weak reasoning and asked softly, "Not that age has anything to do with it, but just how old do you think I am?"

Blake had turned away and didn't answer, although she knew he had heard. From what he'd said about himself, she suspected that however this confrontation ended, he'd lie awake all night stewing about what he should have said.

She knew that repeating her question would do not good. Kouri shrugged and spoke to the ceiling. "In standard Earth years, I'm twenty. Not as old as you, or obviously, as old-fashioned, but old enough to know what I want and make my own choices."

She sat on the edge of the makeshift bed and smiled when Blake tensed away from her. "I began my menses when I was eleven, you know. Here in the slums, that was more than old enough to lose your virginity. I was lucky or, probably, well-protected until then. And I wasn't raped the first time, which makes quite a difference. I've had sex or made love or whatever your society calls it with a few others over the years--both men and women. Some were gentle, some were rough. With some, it was for love or companionship; with others it was for money. As delicate as your sensibilities seem to be, I hope that doesn't shock you further. I offered tonight because there is only the one bed and I didn't want to seem ungracious."

There was still no response from Blake, although it seemed to Kouri that some of his tension had eased. Taking care to avoid the tender lump on the back of his head that the mugger had left, she stroked his curls. "Surely we can just share the bed and blanket? It is, you know, one certain way of keeping warm."

"I..." Blake still sounded uncertain and a little ashamed. He turned over and looked at the girl. Twenty! Her wiry body with the barely noticeable breasts and thin face made her look much younger, although he knew very well how poor nutrition could affect people.

Her words, however, were knowledgeable--if he ignored the slight disappointment that she had failed to disguise. After all, she had survived here in the Garian slums and had even become literate without the protection of parents or a benign government. Under the circumstances, it would have been close to unbelievable if she had pretended innocence.

* * * * * * *

As the highest ranking Federation official available, Servalan was called away to witness the coronation of yet another chief-earl. It was the third coronation that she'd attended in less than two months. However, Garian's location, in the center of no less than eight mining planets, made it useful to the Federation. At any rate, she and the Palace bureaucracy would be glad when the present family that claimed royal blood and the right to rule ran out of fiercely ambitious sons and daughters.

Today's chief-earl was an 80-year-old woman named Claudum. She was the great-aunt of the previous chief-earl, who had been assassinated after only four weeks. Claudum was the reluctant compromise candidate of two factions who differed only in the types of bloody cruelties they employed.

"Finally," Avon muttered when Servalan left. He rose stiffly and dressed. Sex was fine--in the right time and place--but he hadn't been involved in a marathon like this since adolescence. He checked the well-hidden printer and found a message just coming from the **Liberator**. He quickly tore away the connecting wires that suppressed the audio and whispered, "It's about time! Where the hell have you been?"

Jenna immediately launched into a hot-tempered reply which Cally interrupted with the start of a calm explanation. Avon wasn't having any of it and said, "Never mind, save it for later. I don't know where Blake is just now and I assume you haven't located him either. However, I have another way of finding him. So I'll start looking and contact you later." He cut the contact and prepared to leave.

Whether it was wishful thinking on her part or his apparently enthusiastic "desertion" of Blake's cause, or the sex they had shared, but Servalan seemed to trust Avon completely. He was able to leave their quarters without being questioned or stopped by the mutoid guards. However, just in case the Supreme Commander asked, he casually remarked that he was going sightseeing.

As soon as he was away from the Palace complex, Avon pulled a dull, gunmetal-grey disk from his tunic. He twisted the back off and activated the tracking device. Ever since Blake had disappeared after Gan's death, Avon had put a transponder or two in Blake's clothing--in case he 'lost' his bracelet again. The located began vibrating and Avon strolled casually down the street, fingering what appeared to be a piece of not very valuable jewelry.

Careful tracking and watchful surveillance for any too curious on-lookers slowed Avon's progress. However, the signal grew steadily stronger and three hours later Avon found himself in the center of the slum district.

Shortlands! He recognized this as where they had arrived and Avon's pessimism about Blake's survival blossomed anew. Anyone, with any sense at all, would have gotten as far away from here as possible. He had to wonder, too, what Blake, if he was still alive, had made of the Federation troopers and his computer expert's "desertion".

when Avon turned to the right, the signal faded slightly, so he knew that the transponder was in the building on the left. He looked around cautiously; from a distance, he could hear the sounds of the marketplace but this alley seemed completely deserted. Taking a deep breath, he entered the building and began climbing the stairs. The inside of the building was in better condition than the outside. Avon noted with mild surprise that if Blake were still alive, he seemed to have done rather well for himself.

* * * * * * *

Kouri and Blake were asleep in each other's arms. Blake's tunic provided their pillow and their bodies were covered with the girl's chandor and the blanket. The girl's eyes snapped open when soft footsteps came down the hall and paused outside their door. She put her hand over Blake's mouth, nudged him and pointed at the door.

Blake woke immediately and nodded his understanding. Without a sound, he climbed over Kouri and crept to the door, where he listened intently.

Avon stood on the other side of the door, listening just as intently. The tracking unit had produced one last, massive burst of vibration, so the transponder was behind this door. Avon was debating how to proceed when, without warning, Blake pulled the door open and a startled Avon, his hand still on the door's handle, fell into the room.

Blake threw himself onto the intruder while Kouri armed herself with the empty wine bottle. As the two men struggled, she circled and tried to get a clear shot at the clothed man's head.

Suddenly Blake recognized his opponent and shouted, "No, Kouri! I know him. Perhaps we'll kill him later, but just now I want him able to talk."

Blake released Avon and stood up. "Well? You can start talking anytime!"

Avon gasped for breath. Perhaps he was smarter but in this wrestling match Blake was clearly the winner. The computer technician sat up and started straightening his rumpled clothes. When he realized Blake and the female were naked, Avon decided this wasn't a good time to show any fussiness about how he was dressed.

"Well?" Blake drawled in a tone of even menace. "I'm waiting."

"Damn it, I saved your life!" Avon started.

"Oh, really," Blake was disbelieving. But he had noticed the flash of amusement in the other man's eyes a moment ago. Hoping he didn't appear as embarrassed as he felt, Blake casually crossed the room and began dressing. Without giving up her focus on the intruder, Kouri also began to pull her clothes on.

"Yes," Avon said flatly, with his eyes fixed on the wall opposite him. "I saved your life. I heard the troopers, then Servalan's voice. Knowing that she'd kill or re-program you, I managed to persuade her--at some cost to myself, I might add--that I was deserting you. Which she believed. Or did, anyway."

When he was fully dressed, Blake returned to Avon and extended his arm to pull him off the floor. For a breath-holding moment, he examined the face that he had come to know so well, then muttered, "I believe you."

"Well now, you haven't any idea how happy that makes me." Avon was careful to keep any emotion but his usual sarcasm from his voice. "However, I really would like to be rather far away when Servalan discovers that I'm gone. I've heard from the **Liberator** and they're just coming into teleport range. Since the teleport couldn't locate you, there must be something wrong with your bracelet. So let me look at it and let's get out of here."

Blake handed over the bracelet then turned and saw Kouri staring at the floor. "Come with us..." Avon looked up at these words but immediately lowered his eyes when Blake continued, "Come with me?"

Kouri shook her head. "Remember last night when I told you about the four kinds of love that we know here on Garian: agape--divine love, eros--passion, storge--affection, and filia--friendship? Your feeling for the rebellion is agape and I can't possibly compete with that. And I feel storge for you--but nothing more."

Blake's face turned thunderous but Kouri's upraised hands and sad expression prevented him from interrupting. "I'll always be happy that we shared eros, but surely you can agree that it's better for me to stay here and work for your rebellion. There are many things slum-folk can do to sow distrust between the chief-earl and the Federation."

Avon thought about sneering something sarcastic, along the lines of, "Oh good, another convert!" However, a close examination of Blake's and the girl's faces convinced him to keep quiet. He finished fixing the bracelet and tossed it to Blake before muttering, "I'll wait outside."

He closed the door and prepared to wait; then, after hearing one explosive, "Damn it, Kouri," Avon moved down the corridor for the stairs. Eavesdropping was more in Vila's line and besides, there didn't seem any need for him to know what went on between the two.

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Blake and Kouri's conversation was less a conversation than a series of nearly angry demands and disjointed wistful pleas. Blake was inclined to take everything personally and he had, of course, taken Kouri's rejection in that manner.

Finally, Kouri grew angry herself. "Face facts! You don't need me, Blake! And I would be out of place on your ship. You already have a thief and that's my only talent. Still, you think you're going to 'save' me, but you can't accept that I don't want to be saved. My life here isn't that bad and I..." Kouri stopped abruptly when she saw that her well-placed sarcasm at Blake as her savior had wounded.

He tried to shrug it off, pretending not to care, and turned to go but froze when she continued, her voice shaking this time. "Besides, Garian is all I've ever known. Oh, yes," her tone turned vicious and self-depreciating, "you know that I've read about other planets and dreamed about them. But damn you, I'm afraid! If there were more time to think about it. If I knew I could come back, if..."

Blake understood. Even now, there were people on Earth and other planets who knew that sometime in the past, one of their ancestors had gone off into the unknown--whether it was across the emptiness of space or that of a planet-bound desert or jungle. But there was no desire to do the same in the souls of these individuals. Kouri, for all her questions about life on the ship and the planets that he'd visited, was one of these. She'd never be happy on the **Liberator**.

* * * * * * *

Blake gently closed the door behind him. His expression was somber but composed. Even so, after a quick glance, Avon thought Blake's eyes were suspiciously bright. Blake took charge, signalled the **Liberator**, accepted Cally's warm exclamation of welcome calmly and requested immediate teleport.

Ever the politician, Blake thanked everyone for their efforts and for returning for them before he hurried out of the teleport room. If he was somewhat less enthusiastic than usual, the crew attributed it to his bedraggled condition. However, as soon as Blake was gone, Jenna and Vila descended on Avon and demanded a report.

A moment of hesitation on Avon's part passed quickly and, fortunately, none of the others seemed to notice. He started speaking; his own deception of Servalan and Blake's mugging were easy enough to explain. His subsequent tour as the Supreme Commander's "companion" and Blake's young woman were more difficult. Neither situation was anyone else's business and, as four Kouri, well, Avon didn't know the full story.

He picked his words carefully, trying to satisfy their curiosity without saying too much. A gently amused thought shocked him into realizing Cally already knew what had taken place on Garian. Avon suddenly noticed that she had remained apart from the others during his explanation. From the tone of her thought that she let him understand, she probably knew more than Avon himself did. The Auron woman smiled as she turned away and sent a second thought which confirmed his suspicion.

Fortunately, nothing he said made much difference to Jenna. She was only pleased to have Blake back, safely and in one piece. And as for Vila, Avon had long practice in ignoring him.

* * * * * *

Blake was in his quarters and glad to be alone. He knew that Avon would explain enough to keep the others away for a while. Most especially Blake dreaded talking to Jenna. What they shared up to now had been adult and convenient and even at times close to love. Nor had they sworn exclusiveness. Still, Blake didn't want to test her understanding of their arrangement too far.

Away from prying eyes, he took a lock of Kouri's hair from his pocket. Sighing, he put the fragile memento away for safekeeping. In some ways the young woman had reminded him of Vila--a cheerful survivor. Then, still fully-dressed, he settled down on the bed and ordered Zen to dim the lights.

Suddenly Blake sat bolt upright. His heart was pounding and he was close to panic. They had discussed birth control, he knew that much. But what exactly had they said?

He took a deep breath and calmed himself. Kouri had laughed and explained that the one crime certain to lead to the executioner's block was avoiding the annual suppression treatment. The Garian government--so negligent in the areas of general hygiene, food, housing and education--was very efficient in controlling the human slum population. And fortunately Blake had only last month re-administered his own non-repo injection.

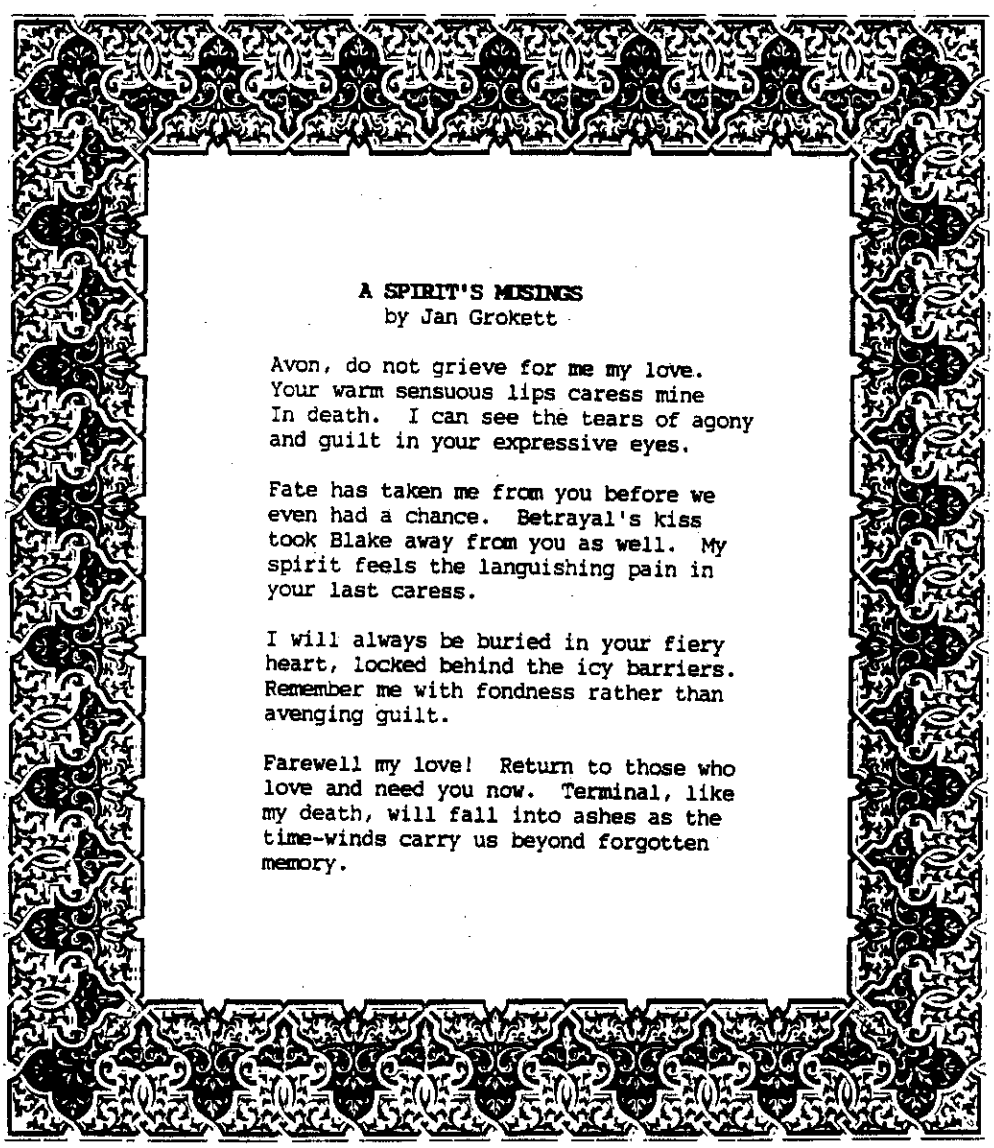
Blake was grateful for this double security as he didn't want to leave any "souvenirs" behind. It would be dangerous for the woman and child, and if nothing else, would have bothered his conscience.

He began humming the folk tune that Kouri had sung to him last night before they finally slept:

What hours where thine and mine, Dear?
What nights have come and gone?
Agape, eros, filia, storge--
Love always makes itself felt.

He made a mental note to have ORAC open a credit account in the girl's name and debated the amount to deposit. Five thousand was the figure he chose. Enough, he

thought, for stability but not to keep her for life. She wouldn't want that. No, Kouri Eiment would only take enough to go on with. He wondered if she'd look on his gesture as payment. Well, he would never know but, living in the slums, he imagined she'd take it gladly--for whatever reason it was offered. Blake suspected that she'd use most of the money for books about space travel and other planets.



A SPIRIT'S MUSINGS
by Jan Grokett

Avon, do not grieve for me my love.
Your warm sensuous lips caress mine
In death. I can see the tears of agony
and guilt in your expressive eyes.

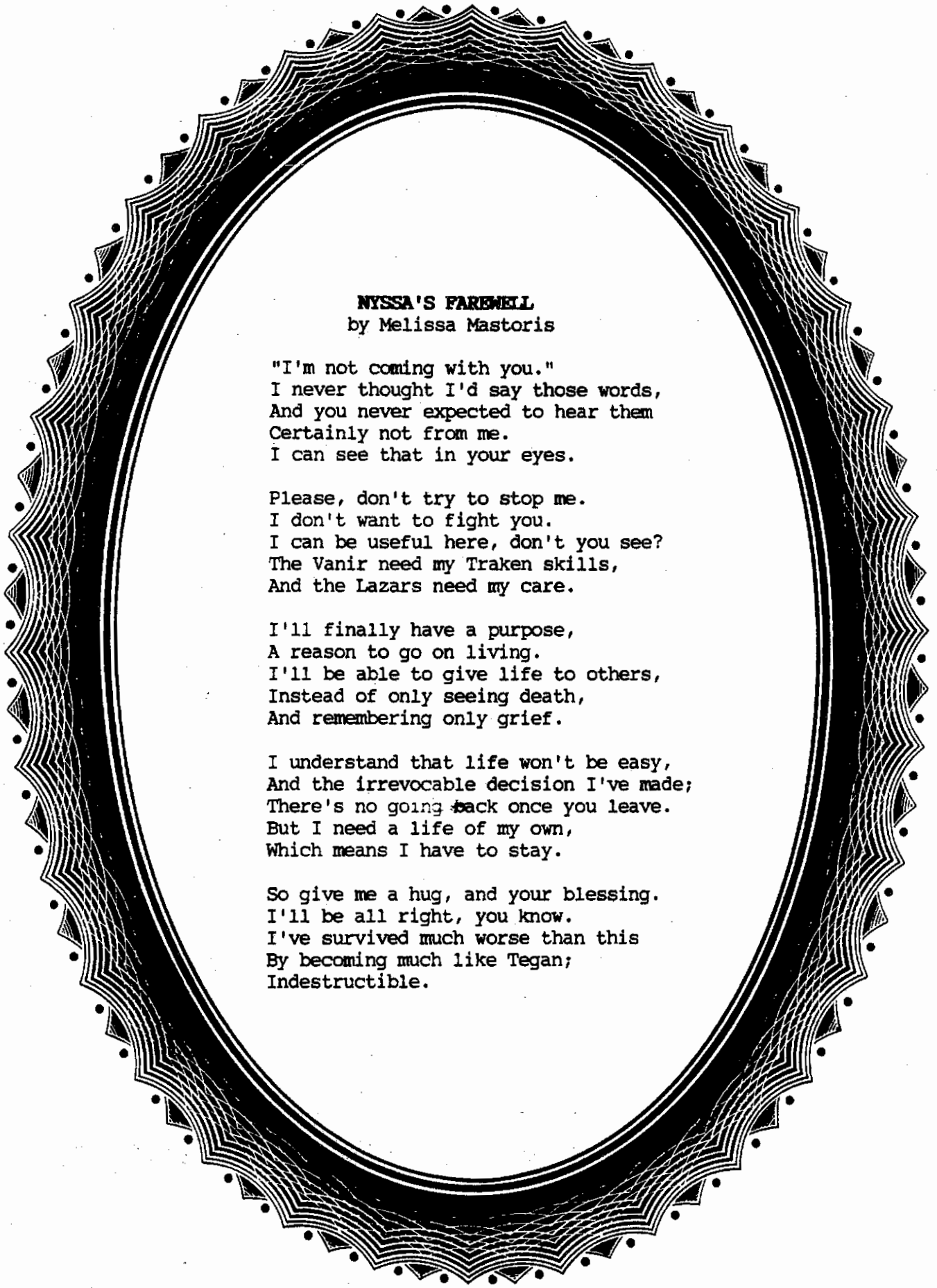
Fate has taken me from you before we
even had a chance. Betrayal's kiss
took Blake away from you as well. My
spirit feels the languishing pain in
your last caress.

I will always be buried in your fiery
heart, locked behind the icy barriers.
Remember me with fondness rather than
avenging guilt.

Farewell my love! Return to those who
love and need you now. Terminal, like
my death, will fall into ashes as the
time-winds carry us beyond forgotten
memory.

Yours in haste!
(and not much else!)

Idea from Mr. Bates TAROSCON '88 Opening Ceremonies



NYSSA'S FAREWELL

by Melissa Mastoris

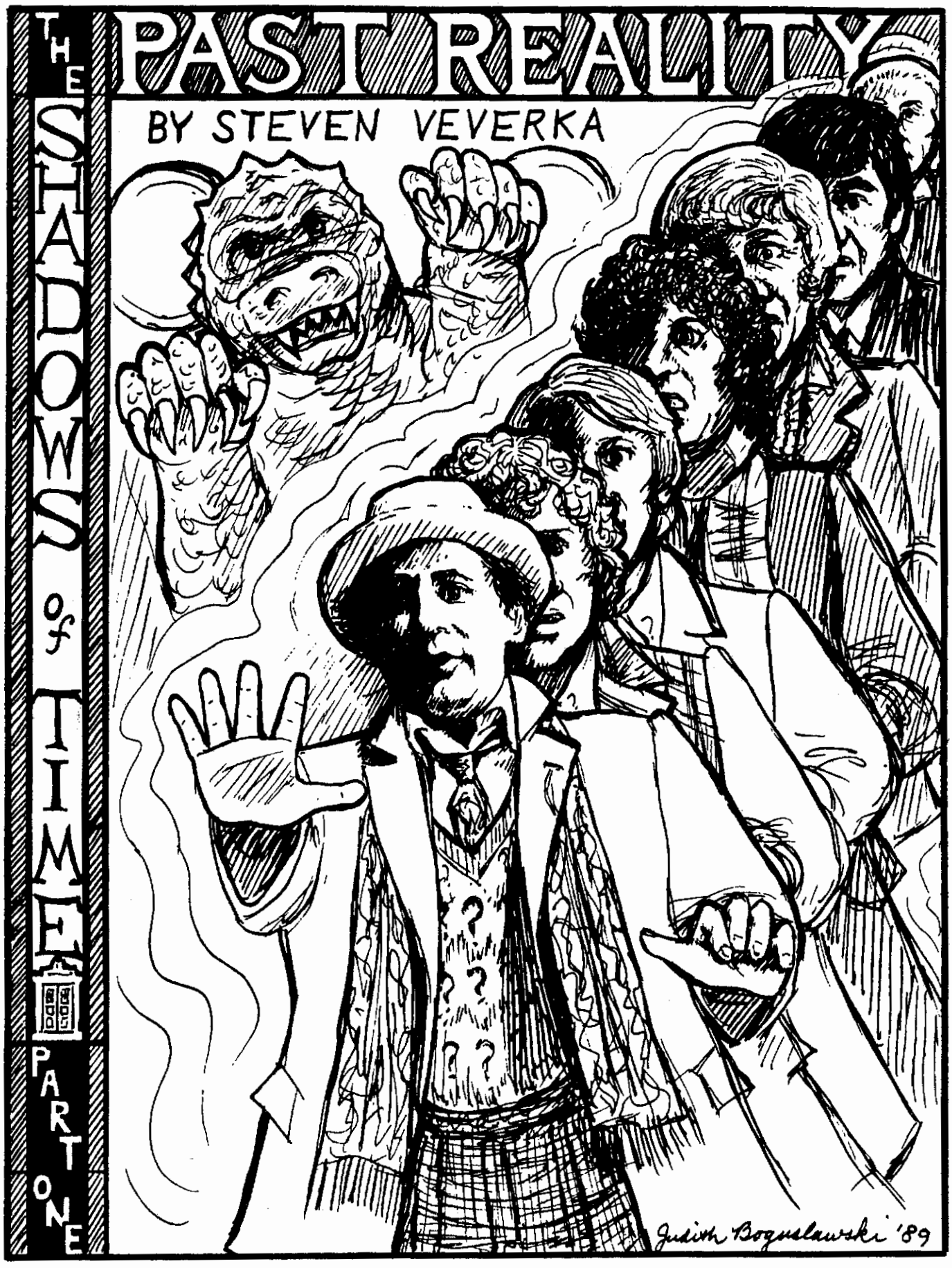
"I'm not coming with you."
I never thought I'd say those words,
And you never expected to hear them
Certainly not from me.
I can see that in your eyes.

Please, don't try to stop me.
I don't want to fight you.
I can be useful here, don't you see?
The Vanir need my Traken skills,
And the Lazars need my care.

I'll finally have a purpose,
A reason to go on living.
I'll be able to give life to others,
Instead of only seeing death,
And remembering only grief.

I understand that life won't be easy,
And the irrevocable decision I've made;
There's no going back once you leave.
But I need a life of my own,
Which means I have to stay.

So give me a hug, and your blessing.
I'll be all right, you know.
I've survived much worse than this
By becoming much like Tegan;
Indestructible.


THE SHADOWS of TIME
PART ONE
PAST REALITY
BY STEVEN VEVERKA
Judith Boguslawski '89

*The creature sped through the Vortex, unaffected even though it travelled alone and unshielded. Its purpose was clear, and its prey was close. The instructions that had been given were precise: demoralize, and then...*destroy!

* * * * * * *

"Look, are you really set on going to Mortare, Mel?" the Doctor asked.

"Entertainment capital of the universe, you said," pipped the red-haired bundle of energy known as Melanie Bush. "We BOTH need a vacation; you said so yourself."

"Yes, but I was thinking along more intellectual lines," he said, idly running fingers through the short black hair that had come with his seventh persona. "The Tri-Planetary Scientific Advancement Exhibition, for example, or the Library of Bontell IV; even a revisit to the Louvre..."

His musings were interrupted by a loud signal from the console. Fidgiting with his tie, he checked a series of switches, a puzzled frown coming quickly to his face.

"What's wrong?" asked Mel.

"Something's converging with us on a direct interception course."

"So?"

The Doctor began moving around the console, checking and adjusting the controls. "So, it SHOULD be impossible to do while we're travelling in the time vortex." He activated the scanner, which showed a fascinating kaleidoscope of shifting and swirling colors. In the precise center, however, a black spot was growing rapidly larger.

"Some other time machine?"

"I don't know," was the answer. "And I'm very sure I don't want to." The Time Lord began to adjust the controls frantically as the blackness enveloped the entire screen. "I'm going to try and emergency mater..."

With a roar, the blackness smashed through the scanner and into the TARDIS. Melanie clamped her hands to her ears and fell to her knees as an unbearable flood of chaotic screeching filled the room. The Doctor struggled to get back to the console, but the thing formed a whirling barrier around it. With a final blast of sound, it 'flowed' into the central column, and the room was silent except for the sizzling, blackened remains of the scanner screen.

Shakily, the Doctor approached the controls and began a quick evaluation. Mel got to her feet and joined him. "Are you all right?" he asked.

"A bit of a headache; what happened?"

He gave one control a final, despondent twist. "We're stranded...locked in the time-space Vortex by whatever that was."

"Where is it now?"

He lifted his hat and umbrella from a nearby stand. "The main engines; it's the only place where it could effect this type of immobilization; stay here, Mel."

She caught his arm. "I'd...I'd rather go with you."

The Doctor smiled and let the way into the TARDIS interior.

* * * * * * *

The creature waited. It had achieved the first stage of its plan, and now the Time Lord was sealing himself into the next phase. All was going well; the Doctor was infinitely predictable. Soon, its task would be complete, and the promised rewards would be given.

It waited...

* * * * * * *

"I've never been here before," Melanie said, idly peeking in a door. "Where are we?"

"Level A12, I think," the Doctor said, peering over her shoulder into the dusty, empty room she had discovered. "We're somewhere near the auxiliary control room; haven't been there since that business with the Master on Gallifrey. Now, let me see, I think it's this way..."

Long used to such instantaneous distractions, she followed the Time Lord as he counted off doors. Finally, he flung one open, revealing a very different version of the control room: brown mahogany paneling and an antiquated, less complex version of the console.

"Now, THIS brings back memories," he smiled.

"Doctor, we're supposed to be going to the engine room; the thing, remember?"

The Doctor sighed. "I know, Mel, I just want to see if this console is usable." He flipped open several long-disused covers and examined the controls underneath.

Melanie, meanwhile, was fishing through a small wardrobe against one wall. Giggling, she emerged with a small marionette. "Wherever did you get THIS?" Getting no response, she turned and gasped.

The Time Lord was leaning heavily on the console, face chalk-white, eyes staring vacantly into space. She ran to him, shaking him gently. "Doctor, what's wrong? Are you ill? Speak to me!"

"Mel..." he gasped, his voice a bare whisper. "Red hair...I remember...red hair..."

She shook him again and suddenly felt the hairs on the back of her neck prickle. Slowly, she looked over her shoulder.

She screamed at the sight of the tall, olive green figure in the doorway; its body resembled a thick, waxy stem; its arms looked like thick, jagged leaves and a nightmarish green and pink flower bud served as a head.

"Doctor! A Vervoid! We have to get out of here!" She looked back at the Time Lord and nearly screamed again, for the small, dark-haired man was no longer there. Instead, a tall burly man with curling red hair and a riotous patchwork coat stood in his place, blinking bemusedly.

"Mel, what are you yammering about? I...YOW!"

He pulled the confused girl after him as the Vervoid lashed out with a talon-equipped hand. Slowly, the plant creature stalked the two travellers around the room.

* * * * * * *

Excellent. the Time Lord was already being affected. The Earth female would experience little, if anything, being such a pathetically short-lived creature, unattuned to the intricacies of time. But as for the Doctor...

* * * * * * *

Succeeding in getting the console between them and the Vervoid, the Doctor and Mel ran out the door, slamming it shut behind them.

"Doctor, what happened?"

"That's what I'd like to know," he replied indignantly. "Those things were all destroyed on the Hyperion III!"

"No, I mean YOU."

"Me? What on earth are you talking about?" His voice began to rise. "At a time like this, you're babbling nonsense!"

Melanie angrily pulled out a pocket mirror and shoved it before his face, halting him in mid-complaint as his jaw dropped in horror.

"Good Lord, it's ME!"

"That's what I've been trying to tell you; I turned away for a second, and when I looked back, you'd changed."

The Doctor felt his face, assuring himself that it was really there. "I can't have regenerated; not BACKWARDS."

"What, then?"

Absently, he handed the mirror back and started down the hall, Melanie hurrying along beside him.

"Some sort of time reversal?" he muttered. "Maybe I slipped over my own time stream...no, I would have met myself, not become myself. Unless..." He stopped abruptly, causing Mel to double back.

"Unless what?"

"Unless, somehow, the TARDIS is no longer sealed against the time vortex."

"You mean, the outside is getting in?"

He eyed her. "Isn't that what I just said?" Before she could form a retort, he was walking down the hall again.

"Come on, we have to get to the engine room."

* * * * * * *

A strong one, this Doctor, and clever as well. Perhaps TOO clever. Knowing would do him no good; his time was too limited.

* * * * * * *

The Doctor pushed open a pale blue door and was met by a light breeze, which did little to cool his temper.

"Ever since I jettisoned a quarter of the TARDIS, I can't seem to find my way anywhere! This SHOULD be the C-3 storage room."

Melanie poked her head past his shoulder and gaped. "A pool!" she squeaked. Then, surprise turned to displeasure: "Why didn't you TELL me there was a pool on board? It would have saved a lot of trouble at Paradise Towers."

"Whose showers?"

"Towers; Paradise Towers! Remember, with the Great Architect? I was almost the main course at a ladies' luncheon!"

"Dear girl, I have no idea what you're talking about."

Mel stared at him. "No idea?"

"It must have happened in my future, after this regeneration. Whilst I DO know what is happening to me now, you can't expect me to know my own future, can you?"

His companion's stare switched to a blank look, and the Doctor rolled his eyes skyward.

Judith Boguslawski '89

"Look, somehow, my own time stream is running backwards over itself; that I know. But whatever happened to me in this Pair-of-Dice Flowers happened after I regenerated. So, since it hasn't happened to me yet, I know nothing about it."

She brightened. "Oh, I see."

"That makes everything worthwhile," he grumbled. "Now that all is settled, can we go?"

Melanie stuck her tongue out at his retreating back and stomped after him, passing him up as his brisk walk slowed. When she realized that she was easily outdistancing him, she looked back.

The Doctor stood rigid, mouth working soundlessly, eyes bulging. She ran back towards him, but before she could reach him, he toppled into the pool, invisible amongst the bubbles and ripples in the water.

"Doctor!"

Sputtering and coughing, the Time Lord resurfaced, grabbing at her outstretched hand. Together, they got him out of the water and sitting on the poolside. It was then that Mel saw exactly who it was she had rescued: a very damp, blond-haired young man in a cricketeer's sweater and creme-colored coat.

"So sorry about that, Tegan," he panted. "Got a bit dizzy and...you're not Tegan!"

"No, I'm Mel," she said looking him over.

"Mel, eh?" He looked around carefully and whispered, "Are you with me?"

Melanie couldn't help but smile at his hopeful expression. "Yes, Doctor."

He struggled to his feet and flapped his arms to shake off what water he could. "The effect is getting worse," he said. "Getting hard to think. Um, where were we going?"

"Engine room."

"Right! Come on!"

* * * * * * *

The rapid time reversal should have sent the Time Lord into a state of utter confusion by now, yet he held on to his sanity with remarkable strength; truly, a worthy opponent. But this was no time for games: there was a job to perform, and the mental collapse had to be hastened.

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The familiar roundel-covered walls had changed somewhat, Melanie thought; the circles were smaller and farther apart.

"We're in an older section of the TARDIS," explained the Doctor when she pointed this out. He stopped walking; they had reached a three-way intersection.

"Which way now?" she asked.

"Doctor, this way."

They turned to see a small, attractive woman in a purple uniform standing in one corridor.

"Tegan!" beamed the Doctor.

"It's down here," the air hostess said, voice betraying an Australian heritage. She raised her arm and pointed down the passageway.

"Right. C'mon, Mel."

"No, Doctor, it's THIS way."

Melanie could not figure out where the aristocratic young girl in velvet had come from. The Doctor, however, seemed not to care.

"You're sure, Nyssa? Tegan says it's that way."

"Positive," she replied, pointing down her corridor.

"You're both wrong," came a third, male voice. "It's this way."

"Adric!" cried the Time Lord happily. "I haven't seen you in so long; how are you?"

He paused; all three were gazing balefully at Mel and himself. As one, they raised their right arms high above their heads, each revealing...

"The mark of the Mara!" the Doctor said, horrified. "No, please, not all three! Please!"

Their maniacal laughter rang out as he fell to his knees, face buried in his hands. Melanie tried to lift him back up, but he resisted, shaking his head and clamping his hands over his ears.

"Doctor, please!" she yelled over the laughter. "We have to find out what's causing this! Get up!"

"No, no, no," he whimpered. "Tegan; Nyssa; poor, poor Adric."

She pried his hands from his ears. "Doctor, Adric's dead! You told me, remember?"

"Dead?" He raised his head and stared at her for a moment. Abruptly, there was silence; the three spectres were gone. Shakily, he got to his feet.

"They weren't real," he said, distantly. "Oh, Adric, I'm so sorry."

Gently, Melanie took his arm. "Do you know which way to go, now?"

Straightening, the Doctor glanced at each corridor and then smiled.

"Yes, I do," he said, patting her hand. "Thank you, Mel."

* * * * * * *

The Earth woman would have to be neutralized; she interfered too much with the breakdown, a psychological crutch for the Time Lord. The destruction of the TARDIS needed, and the Doctor must have no stabilizing influences.

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They had reached another intersection, and the Doctor raised a hand. "You stay here," he said. "I think I had better take a look around first. If I'm not back in two minutes, come after me." Receiving a nod, he started down one corridor. Folding her arms, Melanie leaned against the wall and waited.

"BOO!"

Giving a shriek, she jumped back to see the Doctor grinning at her. "Thanks a lot, Doctor," she grumbled.

"No luck that way," he reported. "C'mon."

With the Time Lord in the lead, they walked down the corridor until he stopped in front of a door. "In here," he said, bowing graciously. Melanie smiled and preceded him inside.

Beyond the door was a large room set up like an outdoor patio, with wicker chairs and glass topped tables with umbrellas in their centers. She looked around in puzzlement.

"THIS is the engine room? I think we took a wrong turn somewhere, Doc-"

Her sentence was cut off as a pair of hands closed tightly around her neck. Struggling wildly, she broke loose and spun on her attacker.

"Doctor!" she screamed. "What are you doing?"

Gone was the gentle innocence of the Time Lord; his eyes were dark with an almost palpable loathing. She dodged behind a chair as he advanced on her again.

"Doctor, please! You've been affected by whatever's happening to the TARDIS. Stop!"

Ignoring her, the Doctor made a grab, missed and hurled the chair out of the way. Melanie tried to run, but he was too fast; a vicious backhanded blow knocked her to her knees, and he seized her throat again. Try as she might, Mel could not dislodge them this time. Blackness began creeping in on the edges of her vision...

Then, she was free! Gasping for breath, she looked up to see the crazed Time Lord fighting to remove something from his face...a scarf??

A tall man with wildly curling hair spun the Doctor around and connected with a right cross to the chin, sending him stumbling backwards. He fell over a chair, there was a flash...and he was gone.

The newcomer helped the trembling girl to her feet. "There, there, everything's fine now."

"Who are YOU?" Mel stammered.

He grinned broadly as he rewound a fantastically long scarf around his neck and shoulders. "I'm the Doctor. And you are...?"

"Melanie," she answered. "But if you're the Doctor, who or what was that?"

"Some sort of physical projection, I'd say; we're very close to the engine room and to the source of all the trouble, so it's trying harder to stop us. Are you feeling better?"

"Yes, thanks."

He extended an arm. "Let's go, then; engine room is two halls over, one flight down. By the way, is K9 with you?"

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The plan had failed; still the Time Lord advanced. It was too soon to allow him to tamper with the engine room computers: he might be able to repair the damage. It was time for a direct confrontation.

* * * * * * *

The Doctor and Melanie stood before a door marked "Main Time Drives and Data Storage Banks". It was almost impossible to read due to its faded and dusty condition.

"The old girl really needs a bit of cleaning up," he muttered. "Well, shall we see what this is all about?"

Mel shuddered. "We haven't much choice, do we?" The Time Lord nodded gravely. Taking a deep breath, she pulled open the door; beyond was darkness.

"Great," she grumbled, peering inside. "Anyone remember to bring a torch?"

"Fortunately, some of us are prepared, Jo."

The voice was different, and, when she turned, so was the Doctor, now a flamboyant figure in a ruffled shirt, smoking jacket, and cape.

"Oh, I do apologize, Miss, uh..."

"Melanie. Doctor, how long are you going to keep this up?"

"Keep what up?"

"Changing every time I turn around."

Susan Szpakowski '89

"Oh, THAT. Well, we're almost at the source of the trouble, so I imagine it will happen even faster now." He grinned. "I don't envy you the next change. However, it means I'm running out of time." He flicked on the flashlight and they entered. Examining a large box of switches next to the door, he flipped one up, and a dim light filled the room, revealing row upon row of dusty, blinking computer banks and consoles.

"What is this place?" Mel asked.

"Data storage room; the 'brain of the TARDIS, if you like." He led the way through the room to a large metal door.

"And now to the heart," he said with a grin. After several moments of heaving, the door creaked open.

The next room was more impressive than the data storage; several huge, silent machines that Melanie could not even begin to identify lined the opposite wall, each with twin pylons of energy jutting from its top. In the center of another wall, a huge, multi-faceted crystal sparkled and shone above a complicated control console in a symphony of colors. But, in the center of the crystal, a wide, jagged black splotch was spreading like a pulsating wound.

"Jumping Jehosophat! The power matrix has been attacked! The TARDIS will be split open like a pea pod!"

He ran towards the console but was flung back as a huge shadowy form rose from out of it. Melanie screamed as the thing grew into a giant dragon-like shape.

"YOUR TRAVELS ARE ENDED, TIME LORD!" it roared. **"PREPARE TO FORFEIT YOUR INSIGNIFICANT EXISTENCE!"**

A huge clawed foot barely missed its mark as the Doctor jumped aside. Mel blinked; he was now a small, comical man in baggy checked trousers and a black frock coat.

"You're trying to shatter the power matrix!" he yelled as the creature drew itself up for another blow. "You'll destroy yourself as well as us if the TARDIS comes apart!"

"I AM DALMORTH: I TRAVEL THE REALM WHERE TIME AND SPACE ARE ONE! I WAS COMMANDED TO DESTROY YOU: I WILL NOT SUFFER WHEN THIS PITIFUL CRAFT IS OPENED TO THE VORTEX!

"ALREADY, TIME LORD, YOU HAVE BEEN AFFECTED AS THE VORTEX SEEPS SLOWLY INTO THE TARDIS. YOU CANNOT WIN: EITHER I DESTROY YOU, MYSELF, OR YOU TRAVEL PAST YOUR OWN EXISTENCE AND CEASE TO BE!" The Doctor ran for his life as Dalmorth launched another blow.

"Doctor!" Mel yelled. "What can we do?"

He slid to a stop beside her. "It's linked itself into the TARDIS, Zoe, but between doing that, attacking the matrix AND generating a physical form to deal with us, I think it should be stretched pretty thin, because it's been reduced to using physical force against us."

The creature loomed over them, biting with its massive jaws. Pulling Mel with him, the Doctor scooted beneath its legs.

"What good does that do us?" she panted.

"I'm going to try leading it between the energy poles of one of the generators. When I do, push the second lever on the right of that console over there all of the way up, but whatever you do, pay no attention to what I do or say. Do you understand?"

She swallowed and nodded as Dalmorth turned to attack again. Patting her hand, the Doctor sprinted towards the nearest of the generators.

"Stay where you are, Zoe...er, whoever," he yelled. "I'm going to reverse the polarity of the neutron flow from the generators; that should fix our little friend!"

Snarling, the beast turned after him as he began clambering carefully, but hastily, up the machine towards the twin pylons, allowing Melanie to run to the console. She nearly screamed again as the Doctor stumbled and fell, but he rose again. She stared; he was an elderly, silver haired gentleman now, still trying to lure the dragon between the poles. Fortunately, Dalmorth's sheer bulk reduced its mobility and speed, and the aged Doctor was able to hold a lead.

After what seemed like an eternity to Mel, the Time Lord crossed between the poles, and tripped, landing in a daze just beyond them. Dalmorth bellowed in triumph as it drew up behind him, raising a titanic paw.

"Now, child!" the Doctor yelled, flattening himself to the top of the machine.

Melanie shoved hard, and the lever slid forward to maximum. Arcs of light leapt between the pylons of each generator, and Dalmorth was caught in a massive crossfire of raw temporal energy. With an ear-shattering howl, the dragon-beast vaporized. As the entire room began to shake with power, Mel pulled the lever back into its previous position. The shuddering subsided, and all was quiet.

"Doctor?"

A hand reached over the edge of the generator. With a groan, the familiar face of the Doctor--HER Doctor--appeared and looked down.

"Well done, Mel. Well done."

* * * * * * *

Melanie joined the Doctor on top of the generator, and both looked through the large quantity of black dust that now covered the machine.

"I'm glad that's over," she sighed. "But where did it come from, and why did it want to kill you?"

"It said that it had been commanded to do so," he replied. "Pity that it didn't say by who."

"By whom," Mel corrected with a grin.

"Whatever," he said, smiling back. "Thank you, Mel. Without you, I probably wouldn't have made it here. And you did well at the console, too."

"What exactly DID I do?"

"You sent the TARDIS into emergency overdrive," he said, bending down to look at something. "I much rather prefer doing things like that from the console room..."

She looked up as his voice trailed off. Walking over to him, she saw that he was holding a small, glassy object in his hand, something like a cube with a sphere inside. It was blackened and cracked.

"What's that?"

"Something I hoped I would never see again," he answered quietly. "A contact cube."

"Contact cube?"

"It's used by the servants of a very powerful enemy of mine, one that I defeated twice before. I was warned that there would be a third confrontation."

Mel was suddenly overcome by a terrifying chill, a feeling of impending doom. The Doctor set the cube down, rose and crushed it under his heel.

"The Black Guardian."

to be continued...

VIRGIL 89 FOR JEFF

THE COMPETITION

by Jeff Morris

art by Laura Virgil

It was the sort of night where a man might wish for a soft, warm bed and a soft, warm woman to guard him from the chill. It was a night where a blazing fire, potent wine, and ribald companionship would come as a welcome blessing. It was not a night where a man would wish to sit huddled over a small fire and wait for sleep to come.

Myal Lemyal felt not a glimmer of fear, however. He threw a handful of twigs on the fire and leaned back, taking a long pull from his wine cask. True, it wasn't the ideal circumstance to be in on a cool autumn night, but it could be far, far worse. For example, he might be trapped in a dimly-lit hovel with a grey, shrewish woman who took great delight in tormenting him, knowing that the chains of matrimony tied him forever to her.

He smiled thankfully at having thus far escaped that fate, and caressed his musical instrument for the forty-fifth time that day. He examined the strings with a practiced, critical eye, making sure that they were properly taut and tuned. He scrutinized the mouthpiece reed. This instrument was a fine work of art, and in the hands of a master, it could make angels weep, devils groan, and women...ah yes, could it ever, Myal grinned, recalling a few old times. And best of all, in all the world, there was but one master of the instrument--himself.

He considered picking up the bizarre-looking creation and playing an idle tune before retiring, but paused in mid-reach and looked out into the nearby grove. "I wouldn't be bothering you if I did a bit of practicing, would I?" he called to the shadows.

"Would it matter if I said it would?" returned a soft, nasal voice that hinted of dark sensuality and darker humors.

"Well...it might." Myal reached for the cask instead. "You could come over to the fire and be social, you know."

"I could," the voice agreed. "Perhaps I choose not to."

"Just what are you doing out there, anyway? Every now and then I hear you talking to yourself..."

"It's the only way I'm assured of intelligent conversation."

Myal snorted. "Oh, that's good, put me down, will you? Might I remind you that it's been **my** talents that have kept us clothed, fed, and boarded these past nights?"

"You'll remind me in any case," the voice quietly noted.

"Damn right. And I might point out that the festival we're heading for is looking for musicians, such as myself, not ghost-killers, such as yourself. You're just sulking because I've got a job now, and you're still at loose ends."

"Perhaps." Parl Dro emerged from the shadows, his black cloak wrapped effortlessly around his body. His long, silken hair matched the black of the night and the cloak, leaving only the pale face with the Roman nose and sharp, penetrating eyes to contrast with the darkness. "Perhaps I should leave your charming, witty company, then, and find my own destiny."

"But you won't," Myal waved the cask at the other man. "Because you feel guilty at having sired me and gotten me into that mess at Tulotef..."

"Don't use that name," Dro cut in abruptly.

Myal's eyes widened. "Why not? Ghyste Mortua doesn't really seem all that appropriate anymore, it's not nearly the terrifying legend everyone thinks it is..."

Parl Dro looked away, gazing at the starless night. "All very true. But there some names which should not be spoken idly, or with a light tongue."

Myal shook his head. "Oh, all right, go all mystical on me again. All your talk of deep, dark secrets and hidden meanings whenever I start hitting on truths. Well, if you'll take first watch, I'm going to get some sleep. We'll reach Garenwyth and their festival tomorrow."

"I wish you'd listened to me when you accepted their offer," Parl murmured, still gazing heavenward.

"We need the money. I'm tired of thieving for our daily bread."

"All the same...I've an odd feeling about Garenwyth."

"Shouldn't bother you at all," Myal yawned as he lay down. "Nothing can really hurt you, can it? No, you're already dead. In fact, sometimes I wonder if you wouldn't like to see me dead, so you'd finally be free..." He curled up in his blanket. "Well, good night, Parl Dro."

He never saw the dark man turn with the faintest trace of a smile etched on red lips. "Good night, Myal Lemyal."

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Garenwyth was a typical town in a typical country setting on a typical day. There was the smithy, there was the market, there was the cemetery, there were the taverns, hidden over there were the brothels...seen one, seen them all, Myal pondered as they walked into the town limits. Rather clean, from the look of it. Probably in preparation for the festival.

A towering, heavyset man with a forest of a beard rumbled forward. "Ah yes! You must be Myal Lemyal. Welcome, friend! Welcome to Garenwyth!" The voice boomed like thunder through the hills. Parl Dro winced at the force of the greeting an limped over to one side, hoping for anonymity. He was not eager to be recognized.

"Yes, I'm Myal," the minstrel replied cheerfully. "And you would be..."

"Call me Bian," the jovial fellow roared. "Ah, I'm so pleased you could attend our festival, friend Myal! Music is such a welcome boon to any celebration, and I'm sure your talents will serve you well in our competition!"

"Thank you," Myal answered, then cleared his throat nervously. "Ah...there was the matter of my advance fee?"

"Oh yes, yes, careless of me," the other man chuckled, producing a small bag that looked promising. Handing it over to Myal, he added, "Now then, friend Myal, allow me to take you to your lodgings--all prepared and waiting for you. Food and drink enough to sate a thousand minstrels! Feel free to wander about, make yourself at ease, and if there is anything you find less than satisfactory, notify me and it shall be set right immediately!"

"Ah, there is one thing," Myal began. He cocked his head towards Parl Dro's brooding form. "My...associate, here, came with me at the last minute, a bodyguard of sorts, you know? Not safe to travel alone these days. Would there be any way to put him up?"

Bian scrutinized the tall dark man; Dro stood there stonily, meeting the intense gaze with cool disdain. "I fear there are far too many visitors to find adequate lodgings," he at last answered. "But if it is not an inconvenience, friend Myal, we might put a second bed in your quarters."

"I don't think there'd be any problem," sighed Myal, thinking of all the suddenly-lost opportunities with the fairer sex.

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Not far from where Parl and Myal stood, a tall, slender fellow with sandy hair and sharp eyes stiffened slightly. He turned to gaze at the odd pair, watching as the big, burly greeter led them towards the same lodgings as those he'd been assigned. His stare focused on the dark, limping man; the gaze did not falter until he'd vanished into the hospice.

Gordan's mouth slit into a smile. He nodded absently to himself, then returned his attention to his lyre and the lovely lass who was attempting to destroy an old love sonnet.

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Myal flopped onto the soft mattress, thinking again of his lost opportunities to test its resiliency. "Well, I must say that it's a pleasure to be recognized and appreciated for what I am, for a change," he remarked to the ceiling.

Parl Dro stood by the window, gazing at the busy tableau before. "I wish I could say the same," he softly replied.

"Eh? What's that supposed to mean?"

Dro turned, his eyes blazing obsidian. "Bian was not enamored to see me. He recognized me immediately. Not surprising, considering my...profession and its notoriety." He had been about to say "former", but caught himself. "My vocation...and those who practice it...are rarely welcome unless we are needed. We stir up memories best left in the sieve of the past."

"Oh," Myal replied politely, bored by the conversation.

"There's something more," Dro added, ignoring his companion's disinterest. "I sensed something as we walked towards the hospice. Something...portentous, regarding you and me. It faded as quickly as it came." He shook his head tiredly. "I don't care for this situation, not at all."

"Oh, come on!" Myal protested. "We've been here barely an hour, and you're already stirring things up. What now, is it a ghost running about? Every town has one, you know that."

"Indeed," Parl smiled sardonically. "Garenwyth has had one for about an hour."

Myal snorted. "Well, forget about ghosts and killing them for the time being. Do the poor wretch a favor and let him be, let the festival go on without your mystic meddling!"

Dro's brow darkened like an approaching storm. "If I were to do the 'poor wretch' a favor, as you so quaintly put it, I would spare him the torment of this mad semi-existence. Do not presume to speak of matters you know little about, unless you'd prefer experience them firsthand!" He glared at Myal, then headed for the door.

"Wait!" Myal cried. "Where are you going?"

"Out."

"But what about me?"

"That," Dro's voice clipped each word carefully, "is entirely your decision." He shut the door with a controlled, tense motion.

Myal pondered the situation for a few minutes, then a slow, lecherous smile lit his face. Bounding off the bed, he headed downstairs for the tavern and soft diversions therein.

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Parl Dro winced at the bright sunlight as he limped out of the hospice. He walked with great trepidation, as if searching for something that just eluded him, that would not let itself be defined. The town was thick with new arrivals; their bodies, alive with sweat and odors, pressed against his cool, placid body. For one who was used to dark, cold nights and empty spaces, he found the situation almost claustrophobic.

He could easily guess what Myal was doing about now. Not that it was difficult to surmise; two options came immediately to mind. He'd sensed his companion's disappointment the instant they'd entered the room; leaving for awhile would hopefully balance the scales somewhat.

As he walked through the crowds, Parl Dro assessed his current situation. *You're still at loose ends*, Myal had said; he'd not known the half of it. Now that he had confronted the truth of his existence, Dro truly did not know what to do with it. Being a deadalive, he knew the endless, nagging ache to be free of this temporal world and its pain. Unfortunately, much as he might want to sever all ties with life, doing so would have rather fatal consequences for Myal.

No, he would not kill Myal in order to kill himself. Which meant that Parl Dro would have to continue his masquerade for some time to come. The problem there was that he was no longer sure he wished to continue in his old profession. The very thought of ghost-killing brought feelings of hypocrisy and revulsion. Who was he to play judge and executioner with beings like himself? Now that he shared the universal ache with them, Parl Dro was suddenly unwilling to inflict further pain upon them, despite knowing that this second death was actually a mercy killing.

Dro glanced up abruptly and smiled as he recognized his surroundings; by an odd quirk of fate, he stood before the cemetery. Or perhaps it was the siren call of rest and peace that drew him here. As he glanced at the worn stones marking the graves, Parl remembered that his own bones lay unburied somewhere. Perhaps he should convince Myal to join him in a pilgrimage of sorts, to put the flesh and blood Parl Dro to rest. Because unless Myal Lemyal did something foolish, it certainly looked like Parl Dro's spirit was going to be around for a long, long time.

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He limped into the tavern next door to the hospice, expecting to find Myal surrounded by lovely, buxom women of questionable virtue. He was not disappointed. But what he also found sitting there gave him pause as his psychic sense signalled caution.

The fellow who sat opposite Myal was lean, with finely-toned muscles. His long sandy hair made a pleasant counterpoint to his tanned skin, but his eyes...Parl nodded as he gazed at the stranger's eyes. They were sharp as daggers, seeing everything and holding their own secrets tightly. Even in this relaxed setting, drinking and wenching merrily, he seemed poised to strike...but at what?

At that moment, the stranger turned with deceptive casualness to the door, and locked gazes with Parl Dro. Seconds passed with neither man yielding. Slowly, with practiced ease, the ghost-killer limped to the table, his eyes never leaving the other's.

"Parl Dro," Myal sang out happily in greeting. "Everyone, let me introduce you to my companion and inspiration."

"I see you've thrown caution and three sheets to the wind," Dro tartly replied. He didn't want that named tossed about too bandily. As it was, several reactions passed through the crowd: several women, having heard of ghost-killers' celibacy, turned away, but others, having heard of their insatiable appetites, eyed him hungrily. The men were more wary, knowing of the power and danger a ghost-killer carried with him.

"I'm not drunk," Myal protested thickly. "Just feeling like enjoying myself, that's all. Lemme introduce you to someone here, he's in the competition too. Parl Dro, meet my fellow minstrel, Gordan Sumter."

"Pleased," the sandy-haired man smiled, offering his hand. "I almost feel as if we've met before."

"I don't believe so," Parl replied, shaking the hand politely, "but I understand the feeling."

"Gordan and I're competing for first place in our field," Myal grinned as a serving maid filled up his glass. "'Course, I'm going to win, sorry to tell you."

"We'll see," Gordan nodded with a sly smile. "If you keep on drinking this stuff, you'll belch your way to last place."

"Maybe you're right," Myal agreed vigorously. "Maybe I need to rest. Any of you kind ladies care to help?" Two of the girls giggled and took his arms, positioning him

between them. "Thank you, thank you," me smiled at them; Parl noticed that he looked far more sober than he had seconds ago. "My good friend, Parl, can I trust you to stay away for..ah, an hour..." He glanced at the smiling women. "No, two hours?"

"I believe I can restrain myself," Parl nodded with quiet amusement.

"Very well. Onward, then!" Giggling and jiggling, the trio staggered out the door. The other women, having lost their free ride, sighed and left the table, leaving Parl Dro and Gordan Sumter to stare at one another.

"Quite a fellow," Gordan finally offered.

"More than meets the eye," Dro agreed.

"Is he as good as they say?"

"That, I fear, would depend on what 'they' say." Dro poured himself a glass of wine. He saluted Gordan, who watched with interest as the ghost killer sipped at the sweet liquor.

"And you're Parl Dro," he began again momentarily.

"I believe so. I am wearing his clothes, at the very least."

"The legendary ghost killer who conquered Tulotef." The last word was subtly emphasized, as if seeking a reaction.

"I see word gets around," Parl casually replied.

"In my profession, word of mouth is essential."

"One never knows what rumor or news might spark a song," Parl concurred.

"Ah, I wasn't speaking of that." Gordan leaned forward, his eyes ablaze with keen intent. "Y'see, I'm only a minstrel when I can't find work in my main vocation."

Dro smoothly finished his wine and set down the glass. "And what that might be?"

Gordan flashed a steel smile. "I kill ghosts."

After a brief eternity, Parl Dro took a deep breath. "It would seem you have something in common with both Myal and myself."

"It would seem so, wouldn't it?" Gordan's tone was light on the surface, but beneath it lay a cunning, probing challenge. He casually poured himself another glass of wine. "Excellent vintage. You know, wine is one of the few things that remains eternal, and actually improves the longer it's about." He took a sip and savored the taste. "Music too, of course--unlike the composer or artist, sad to say. Alas, we are but temporal creatures, doomed to a brief time here with which to make some mark on destiny. But then, such is fate, wouldn't you say?"

"You've a glib tongue," Dro remarked.

"Part and parcel with the job. Ghost killing doesn't pay well, nor does it make one welcome in town, as you know, but a minstrel--ah, a good minstrel, even a fair-to-middling one, he can pay his way by paying a tune or two. He can get a free meal, a night with a lovely lady, and is almost always welcome wherever he goes. Just some of the benefits of being alive, eh?"

Dro remained quiet. *Just let him prattle on,* he told himself, *and he'll get to the point soon enough.* Not that Dro didn't know what that would be.

"I didn't want to be a ghost-killer, you know," Gordan continued, leaning forward conspiratorially. "No, the music was always my first love, and I was good at it. But when I was sixteen and went off to see the world, in one town there was a ghost. And I discovered I had the Gift. I could sense them, wherever they existed. And I learned to destroy them.

"Well, needless to say, it wasn't something I was looking for--the pay's bad, as I said, the jobs are tough, and the benefits are nil. Again, you know all this. But alas, I find that when I sense a ghost nearby, I am compelled to seek it out and kill it. A curse, perhaps, or fate?" He finished his wine and set the glass down with a heavy thud. "I don't know. It pays the bills, allows me to continue wandering, and it's always good for a song or two. People love to hear about ghosts, but when they're faced with one, or worse yet, a ghost-killer, well now, that's quite another story."

"As you said," Dro drawled, "it's nothing I've not learned myself."

Gordan leaned forward again, a curious smile flashing. "I'll tell you something else, Parl Dro. There's a ghost here, in case you didn't know."

"Is there now?"

"Oh yes. I sensed it awhile ago, just when you and Myal were coming into town, in fact. My mind was filled with the compulsion. So while I'm here, I'm going to track it down, find it's link..."

"Do go on," Dro urged sardonically.

"Then," Gordan whispered, "I'm going to kill it." His eyes locked with Parl Dro's again.

Abruptly the younger man lurched backwards, smiling broadly. "Well then, my friend, I'm off to practice for the evening's festivities! Until then, I give you my regards!" He waved cheerily and strode confidently out.

It was a long time before Parl Dro moved away from the table.

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The cool of the evening was a welcome counterpoint to the relentless heat of the afternoon. The torches had been lit at dusk, and now the nighttime revelry commenced with earnest. Families jumbled along the pathways, viewing the performers lining the thoroughfares. Couples browsed dreamily along the artisans' booths, or slipped into the shadows to melt against one another. Bachelors of all ages drank heartily from the ale that flowed like a river, and their female counterparts stood not far off, observing and reporting on everyone and everything about them.

"I knew I'd like Garenwyth," Myal grinned at a brooding Parl Dro. The musician was relaxed and buoyant, obviously feeling the results of his afternoon holiday. He was careful enough, however, to avoid any undue contact to his beautiful instrument. "By the way," he added with a sidelong glance at his companion, "what did you think of Gordan? Quite a fellow, isn't he?"

"That," Dro replied under his breath, "would be an understatement."

Myal paid scant attention to the ghost-killer's dark mood. "Well, here's hoping that these people appreciate good music tonight. They look to be in a mood for upbeat songs, wouldn't you say? Yes, perhaps a few of the dance tunes, with a contemplative selection in the middle for balance. But nothing too depressing, that should do it, eh?"

"Whatever you say," Parl murmured. He gazed up at the main stage, where several of the competing musicians were preparing for the main event. Gordan was among them, carefully tuning his own instrument with the tenderness of a lover.

"Well, I'm off. Wish me luck!" Myal turned away with an excited grin and bounded up the steps leading to the stage. Parl watched him mingle with the other minstrels, then sit down and prepare his bizarre instrument. As his eyes passed over the others, Dro's eyes were drawn to Gordan Sumter. And it was with no surprise that he found the young man's gaze upon him as well.

At long last Bian lumbered forward, raising his hands for quiet. "Greetings, friends and fellow revellers!" his voice rolled across the sea of celebrants. "Welcome to the annual Garenwyth festival! I trust all are enjoying themselves?" Obviously a rhetorical question, Dro mused, but the crowd roared its affirmation, to Bian's delight.

"That does my heart well! Now then, friends, I am pleased to commence the Musical Competition, in which the winner shall receive this bag of silver!" He held the heavily-laden bag high in the firelight. "We've called near and far, bringing the finest musicians here to play for you. You shall decide the finest player! So without further delay, let the competition begin!" Another roar of cheering emerged from the audience, finally dying enough to permit the first contestant to begin. He gazed about nervously, cleared his throat and began to play.

Myal was the final player, meaning that Parl had to sit through a long, tedious procession of mediocre minstrels. Perhaps they were quite good in their own right, he silently conceded, but having heard Myal play, all music in comparison simply paled. So he waited patiently for the inevitable outcome.

Gordan was just before Myal, and Parl's attention returned with keen interest as the musician began. His first song was one of a lover who had built a fortress around the heart of his beloved, and now wished to breach it. This was highly received by the crowd, which gave him the loudest cheer thus far. He followed it up with an instrumental that was both uplifting and tinged with an ominous hint of danger; this too was given a rousing round of applause. But his final selection was the most stirring, and the most unsettling. It was a song about an undead that lurked about at night, begging for a freedom that would be forever denied it. Dro's soul trembled in sympathy as the song wound on; it was almost a relief when the song finished and the applause drowned out the unbearable memory.

Now Myal Lemyal stepped to the center of the stage, smiling with easy confidence as he slipped the reed in his mouth. His hands slipped into position, and from the very first note plucked, he sent the crowd into a dancing frenzy. The music was irresistible--brightness and cheer made tangible, and by the he'd finished, the crowd was begging for more.

Parl waited for the more somber tune Myal had spoken of performing, but instead the minstrel followed his first tune with a similar melody. People clapped and cheered him on, and his playing grew even more magnificent with each note struck. When the final chord had been strummed, there was no doubt as to who would win this tourney.

One selection to go. Myal took a deep breath and plucked a few lonely, solitary chords, adding a wailing, forlorn counterpoint with the reed. An uneasy sigh of despondancy rippled through the crowd. From his shadowy corner, Parl Dro froze in stunned amazement. He'd heard this song once or twice before, but never did he dream that Myal would dare play it in public, much less at a festival.

It was the song he'd composed about Ghyste Mortua.

When at last he'd finished, there was no applause, no sign of approval from his audience. It was as though they'd been drained by the haunting, ghostlike melody and its dark beauty. Myal gazed confusedly at the audience, then slowly descended from the stage. The crowd dispersed without declaring a winner.

Myal stepped up to Parl Dro, confusion in his eyes. "I didn't think it would affect them like this," he whispered.

"I thought you were going to try something contemplative, not depressing."

"I was, but at the last second...I don't know, I just felt like trying to play it, just to show them what Ghyste Mortua was like, just to see what would happen. I never thought...was it good?" he abruptly asked Dro.

"I fear it was rather too good," Parl smiled slightly. "It was far too effective. You'll most likely not win this tourney, Myal. In fact, you'll be lucky not to be thrown out of Garenwyth, for having thrown the festival into a fit of depression."

* * * * * * *

As it turned out, the Festival committee decided that since no winner had been chosen, the purse should be split equally between the contestants. Accordingly, Myal was given a hero's welcome when he and Parl returned to the hospice. Glasses of wine were thrust into their hands and the health heartily toasted.

"After all," one inebriated singer noted, "before, there was always the possibility that we'd leave Garenwyth empty-handed and sober. Now, we all leave empty-handed and hung over!"

The room grew boisterous and rowdy, with various tunes of questionable origin and even more questionable taste being played. Myal, naturally, led the most obscene ones with drunken enthusiasm. Parl Dro sat slightly away from the crowd, content to merely observe the party in progress.

Gordan came staggering along with a wine jug in one hand and a pretty girl in the other. "What's this?" he demanded. "You've an empty cup, my friend, and we mustn't have that!" He shakily poured a generous portion of the wine into Dro's cup. "There now, drink hardy, for tomorrow it's back to reality for us!" He gazed at Dro for a long moment before resuming his staggering swagger to another table.

Before Parl could taste his wine, Myal stumbled over, also with a lovely girl in tow. "And this is my good friend Parl," he announced to her, a slight slur blurring his words together. "Parl, may I introduce Sharla, a lady of high status and breeding who has deigned to join the orgy in here." He lunged abruptly at Dro's glass and snatched it away, downing it in one long guzzle. "No sense in giving him any of the good stuff, you know, it's wasted on him, believe you me," he regally informed the girl, leering suggestively at her and hinting that his comment went deeper than just the wine. He floated away on her giggles, leaving Dro alone at the table with no wine and fewer options for the future.

* * * * * * *

It started at about two in the morning, with Myal groaning as he stumbled into the dark room. This was followed by ten minutes of violent vomiting, the dry heaves wracking the minstrel's clammy body. After helping his ailing son to a bed, Parl Dro gathered blankets from a chest and heaped them upon Myal's shivering body. After this, there was little else to do but offer comfort and strength.

Parl immediately guessed the problem; from the symptoms, it was obvious Myal had been poisoned. The logical next step was to fetch a physician, but without knowing which specific drug had been used, any antidote would be based on guesswork and chance. In addition, Parl felt an odd reluctance to act further; his soul seemed to rebel at any overt attempt to aid the stricken singer.

If Myal died, Parl Dro would be freed from his semi-existence. If he lived, Parl would remained imprisoned. He wanted Myal to live; he did not want Myal to live. Caught between the choices, Parl Dro could do nothing, save watch Myal groan and writhe on the sweat-soaked bed.

Around four, a soft knock against the door reached Parl's ears. Myal had quieted down by now, slowly easing into a final coma as the drug overwhelmed his body's remaining defenses. The ghost killer moved quietly to the door, relieved to able to step away from the fatal drama. He opened the door and gazed into Gordan Sumter's surprised face.

"I suppose I shouldn't be amazed to see you," the younger man grinned. "You are a deadalive, aren't you?"

"Very perceptive of you," Dro answered in a tone chill as the grave. "Though I believe your little test had consequences you weren't counting on." He opened the door further and let the other man inside. Gordan gasped in shock as he saw Myal's pale form on the bed.

He whirled towards Parl. "He...how?"

"The poison you no doubt slipped into my glass of wine never made it to my lips," Dro replied curtly. "Myal took it first. So I'd say you made your point. I am a deadalive. And now you'll succeed in killing me...the only way you possibly could."

Gordan's eyes narrowed, contemplating Dro's words in an attempt to understand them. Then he stared first at Myal, then at Parl. "He's your link?" he at last managed to speak.

"It's a long story, one you need not bother to learn, since it appears that it'll be a moot point before long. So leave now, if you don't mind. I'd prefer to be alone with Myal until the end."

Instead of complying, Gordan stood there stonelike, lost in thought as he gazed at Myal. "I never meant for this to happen," he softly said. "The poison would simply have

told me whether or not you were deadalive. Had it affected you, I would have given you the antidote. If not..I would have watched you, found your link, and destroyed it."

"Well now, the best laid plans..." Parl Dro drawled.

"You don't understand!" the younger man cried, his eyes pleading desperately for mercy. "I never meant for anyone else to be hurt! I thought that I'd be doing you a favor! How was I to know you had a living link?"

"I don't blame you for that," Dro replied. "I blame you for stupidity and sloppy thinking." Turning away from Gordan and Myal, he softly added, "You might be doing me that favor still."

"And I'd be guilty of murder," Gordan shook his head. Sighing, he fumbled about in his sidebag, removing a small clay container. "This is the antidote. It works quickly, no matter how long the stuff's been in your system. He'll feel like hell for a few days, but he'll live."

Parl stood still, neither taking the vial nor rejecting it. Gordan held it out, eyes filled now with confusion. "Don't you want him to live?"

"I don't know." A whisper, carried on the breeze that flickered through the dark room.

Gordan looked at Dro as if truly seeing him for the first time, then carefully set the vial down on the bedside table. "I've done my part," he said quickly as he headed for the door. "Now Parl Dro, it's up to you. Which means more to you--your freedom or Myal's life?

"I've done my part," he repeated as the door shut. "Now you do yours." The lock clicked into place.

* * * * * * *

He stood at the limits of Garenwyth, wincing a bit at the harsh morning sun as it poured into his eyes. He wondered whether his black cloak would serve any purpose other than appearances and smothering him, and considered removing it for the day. Choose appearances, he nonetheless opened it up slightly, letting the breeze fill the soft material and flap the edges about.

Parl Dro gazed first at the tattered remains of the festival, then at the long empty lands awaiting his footsteps. He'd have to make good time today, despite his leg's constant aching. Somewhere, someplace, there were ghosts, deadalives trapped between origin and destination. And Parl Dro, who stood between the gates of the living and the dead, who knew the sufferings of the deadalive and the means to end their pain, was needed in those unknown places.

"Well, it's about time I found you! D'you know, Bian wouldn't let me go until I accepted seven gold pieces as reimbursement for the illness? Said he felt responsible, said I might need it until I'm completely back on my feet?" Myal Lemyal, still somewhat pale but growing stronger by the minute, trudged towards his father-friend. "Of course," he added, "It could all be just a bribe, to get me out of there without spilling the truth to everyone about what really happened. Or to get rid of you in the bargain."

"Oh?" Parl Dro asked, welcoming the inevitable banter. "What gave you that impression?"

"The ten gold pieces he held in reserve, just in case I didn't accept the initial offer," Myal breezily replied, holding up a small bag containing seventeen gold pieces. "Well, Parl Dro, where shall we go?"

Dro smiled and gazed out at the miles before them. "Forward," he laconically replied, "might be the best direction."

SUM TOTAL: SOOLIN
by Jacqueline Taero

Mine is the mystery you will not solve;
Mine is the heart that will never dissolve.

Mine is the glitter of sunlight on ice;
Cynosure and cypher, fortune's device.

I offer no key to the past concealed;
Try as you may, you'll find nothing revealed.

That door is closed; did you not hear it slam?
Ask not, for you'll never know who I am.

A TIME TO GRIEVE, AND A TIME TO CELEBRATE

by "Stew"

I strode down the aisle and signalled to the organist. She began playing a very reverential "Song of Joy" as I slid into the front pew beside Reno.

"Rawhide! Where were you all?" he whispered. "Eunice got the pre-wedding jitters?"

"No--Buckaroo has," I replied flatly. "Did Flyboy think she jilted him?"

Reno grinned. "Hell, no."

But then the vicar signalled for us all to stand. I cast my gaze briefly round the little sandstone church. The late afternoon sun streamed in through the stained glass windows, igniting the flowers to all the colours of the rainbow. Buckaroo stepped through the open door with a radiant Eunice on his arm.

For a long moment I took in the sight of our young intern, beautiful in her gown of swathes of white silk. Eunice had sure made waves since she joined the Institute three months ago. For a start, she had been our most promising and energetic recruit since Perfect Tommy first presented himself. And as soon as she'd met Cavalier Flyboy Johnson, she'd fallen wildly, sweetly in love with him. Her innovative intelligence combined with her whole-hearted passion for the bemused Flyboy had touched everyone's hearts--none more so than Buckaroo. Experiencing parental pangs for the first time, Buckaroo had asked Eunice to please at least postpone the wedding until her eighteenth birthday. Eunice had agreed. After all, it gave Tommy time to design her wedding dress.

Buckaroo crouched by her in the doorway to re-arrange her train, and then they stepped out for a very proper walk down the aisle. Eunice was joyfully sure. Buckaroo--maybe those last few moments of reflection had been the only time I'd stopped worrying about him. I could read so much now in his face. His joy and pride for Eunice was warring with his memories. It had only been two months ago that Mr. Simpson had walked down the aisle of another church with Peggy on his arm, and Buckaroo himself had waited where Flyboy now stood, a grin as wide as the Grand Canyon on his face.

I could see the pain in him. There was a tear in his eye for happiness, and another for grief. His smile was quirkily lopsided. He bravely refused to meet my anxious gaze as they passed the front pews and reached Flyboy's side.

"Dearly beloved," the vicar began. I wasn't really listening to the words--just wondering who was shaking harder--Flyboy or Buckaroo. And then, "Who gives Eunice to be married to Edward?"

"I do," Buckaroo declared, placing Eunice's hand in Flyboy's.

"Thank you. You may sit down now."

Buckaroo pressed a kiss against Eunice's cheek, and stumbled back to where I sat. "Thank heaven that's over. I thought I'd forget my lines."

"Sure, boss." I put an arm around the poor man's shoulders. "How you doin?"

"Just fine, Rawhide." He looked around at my silence, and smiled ruefully. "It's Eunice's day. Don't make me spoil it."

"How could you spoil it?"

"I could break down sobbing at the slightest provocation." His eyes twinkled with mingled tears and mirth.

"You're meant to cry at weddings, remember?"

Reno broke in: "But you're not meant to chatter through the entire ceremony."

We grinned and shut up. Then I watched Buckaroo sink further into his memories. By the time he went off to sign the certificate as witness, he had tears pouring down his face.

"Maybe it will do him good," Reno suggested.

"Are you kidding?"

"He's sort of been hiding from it all. Sometimes, to hear him talk, you'd think he'd never been through this himself. Maybe re-living his own wedding will help." Reno shrugged. "Try and look on the bright side."

As it turned out, Reno may well have been right. Buckaroo returned to sit by me, looking happier than he'd been for far too long. I didn't dare say anything--I just let rip with the smile I reserve for him alone.

"Hey, Rawhide," he grinned.

And then Flyboy was kissing his bride, and the Cavaliers were all cheering and whooping, and the bells were ringing. Mr. and Mrs. Johnson ran down the aisle, the rest of us following, pouring out into the sunshine. Eunice stood on the steps, hanging onto Flyboy's waist and laughing.

"Come on, Mrs. Johnson!" Buckaroo called out delightedly. "It's time to throw the bouquet!" The guys in the party stood by, laughing at Buckaroo, who remained firmly amongst the milling unmarried women.

I figured Buckaroo had let his relief go to his head. He'd been so nervous about being involved in the ceremony, almost as if he felt himself to be a bad omen. All very unscientific. But it seemed as if he was now having his equal and opposite reaction. "Buckaroo," I said, "I don't know if you realise, but you just don't qualify for bouquet-catching."

He laughed. "Rawhide, you sexist! This is an equal opportunity wedding celebration. Come on, you guys!"

The unmarried men in the wedding party mingled happily with the women. Buckaroo's craziness was infectious.

Eunice closed her eyes and Flyboy spun her around. She flung the bouquet in a high arc, the white ribbons fluttering in the sunlight. Buckaroo lunged rather out of his way to catch it. He stood with it in his hands, grinning triumphantly at me. "There's hope yet!" he declared.

"Huh."

"Come on, Rawhide--join in. You might get lucky with the garter."

I obediently shuffled in closer and watched Buckaroo eyeing Eunice's stockinged leg as Flyboy slowly drew her garter off.

Flyboy closed his eyes, and was spun around before flicking the garter away like an over-sized rubber band. I caught it more from an instinct of self-preservation than anything else.

"Rawhide--it's your lucky day!"

"Would have taken my eye out," I complained. Buckaroo's smile didn't falter for a moment, and eventually I couldn't help but smile back.

He skipped around now, tossing handfuls of confetti over all and sundry. Eunice and Flyboy called goodbye and were driven off to everyone's loud best wishes. The rest of the party filtered off towards the bus, heading for the champagne. I saw Buckaroo, alone and quiet now, wandering off in the other direction. I followed him, stepping amongst the haphazard grave stones.

"Great catch you took there," I said.

"Not bad yourself."

"I didn't have to make quite the same effort," I observed.

"Ah well," he nodded knowingly, "you've got to go for what you want. Isn't that right, Rawhide?"

"Yeah, boss." Suddenly all the previous worry for him descended on me again. These swings in mood just weren't like him.

"Hey, Rawhide," he said. I looked up to see a smile in his eye. "I got the bouquet, and you got the garter--doesn't that give you any ideas?"

"Ha! You wish."

And then he was serious again. "What I wish is that poor Peggy needn't have died. I wish that for her sake more than my own."

"I know, Buckaroo. We all wish it."

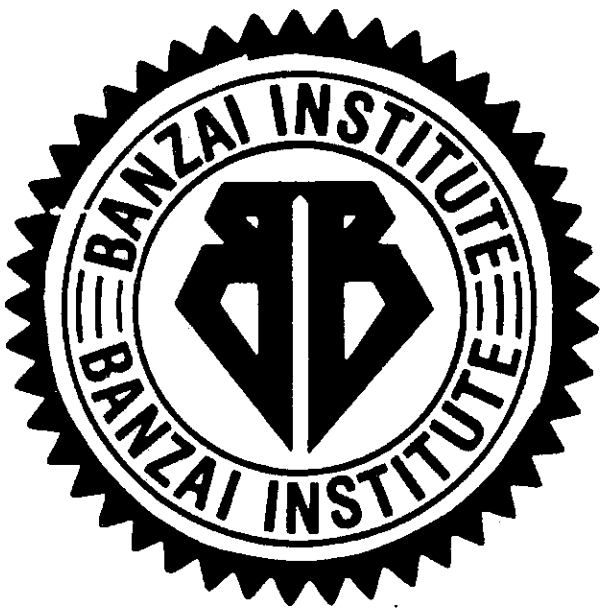
"But we just have to go on from there. Life continues--trite, but true. Eunice has given me that at least. Something she said, when we were signing the register, made me see--"

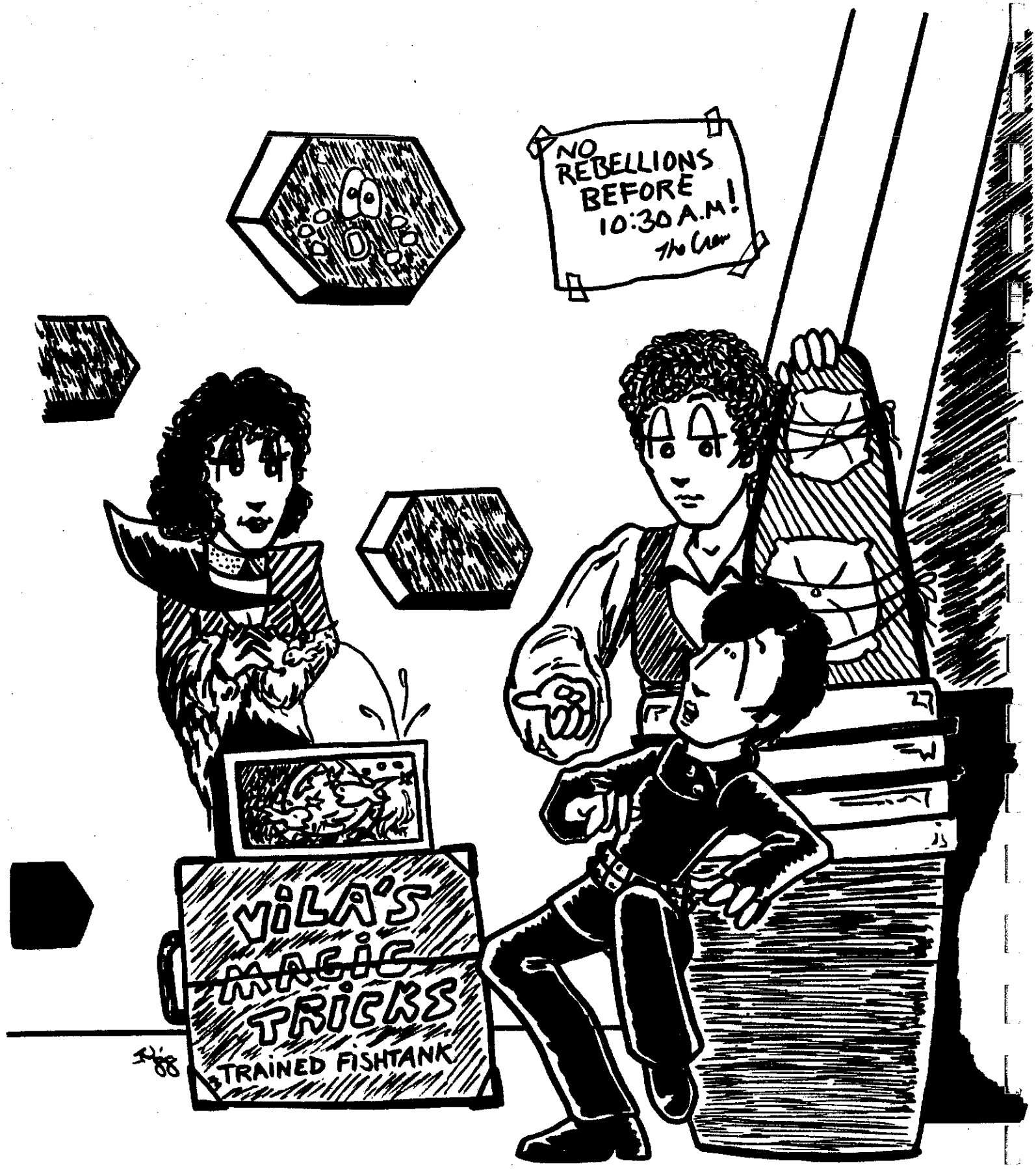
"Hey guys!" came Reno's voice. "Bus leaves with or without you!"

"I'm all right now, Rawhide. I promise you, you can stop worrying now."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. You've been too good a friend, you know." And he gave me a hug before we made our way back to the party. I might never know what Eunice had said that I never had, but I was too happy to care. It was time for some serious celebrations.




NO REBELLIONS BEFORE 10:30 A.M!
The Czar
VILA'S
~~MAGIC~~
TRICKS
TRAINED FISHTANK

Everybody remember Avon's commonly-accepted allergies, which never existed? Or, to put that in **his** *words:*

"Eberybuddy rebeber Avid's cobbodly-agzepted addergied, whigh deber ezistel?"

SUPPER AND BE SILENT

A BLACK-AND-WHITE BLAKE'S 7 story by Julie Nowak

"Where's Avon?" asked Blake, striding onto the flight deck with Cally in tow. He looked around for the crew's resident harbinger of doom. "Vila, have you seen Avon?"

The little thief glanced up from where he was comfortably sprawled on the flight couch, pitcher in hand (hey, **real** Deltas don't use a glass), busy ogling Scantily Clad Lady Space Ninjas, Part Three: The Unveiling.

Vila thought for a second, which was an amazing feat considering what he was drinking. "No," he replied at last, as his vocal equipment broke free of a paralysis induced by his beverage. "I don't particularly want to see Avon, either. This is **much** more interesting."

Blake and Cally looked up at the movie screen. The alien telepath blushed furiously and turned away, reflecting once again that Avon was right: Deltas weren't really people after all; they were only suited to menial labor, thievery and perhaps being best friends with snitty computer geniuses.

Blake blinked in confusion, trying to follow the plot of the film. Had he Vila's experience, he would have realized immediately that there was no plot, but of course he hadn't, and so he struggled to comprehend the action before him. "Is this some sort of sports tournament?" he inquired.

The pickpocket shot him a look and then decided that he would rather avoid another lecture from a morally-shocked Blake. "Uh...yes. You could say that, I suppose. Certainly requires a lot of muscular development!"

"I see." The rebel leader frowned, bemused. "What is the shredded coconut for?"

There are some questions it is better not to answer; Vila deemed this one of them and instead took a long slug of asparagus-and-carrot whiskey. Time to divert Leaderman. "Uhm..." he said casually, which should have worried Blake immediately, but the other man was still trying to decipher the movie-of-the-day. "You asked if I'd seen Avon. Mercifully, I haven't." A sly smile snuck across his clever features. "Is he in trouble?"

This was entirely too happy a thought. Avon had managed to chop Vila's long ponytail (endemic to his half-hippie lifestyle) off in an airlock door not three weeks ago, and now the tech was wandering about making smart remarks ad nauseum about Vila's "thinning thatch". The pickpocket's eyes were alight. "Is he going to get in trouble? Oh, I hope so, he gets away with absolutely **everything...**" He abandoned his perch and went to stand beside Blake, babbling eagerly in hopes of vengeance and justice. "Come on, let me in on it," he urged, "is Avon in for it this time? He gets away with murder...and I do mean **murder**, but if I do something wrong it's always 'Vila, I'm not letting you out of there 'til you've fixed it, and no drinks for a week except recycled water', which, I might add, is perfectly dreadful stuff!" He made a face.

"The taste of water is so foreign to your taste buds that they go into shock on the infrequent occasions when that substance accidentally encounters them," Avon snapped, following Jenna onto the flight deck.

"**Accidentally** is right," Vila informed him. "Blake's going to read you the riot act," he sing-songed at the computer tech. "You've really done it now."

About sixty assorted plots on which he was currently working raced through Avon's mind, but Blake couldn't possibly know about any of them. Maybe he'd finally found out about how they had drained all of the funds from that big convention? Or had he found out that his computer wizard was dating their arch-enemy, Servalan? Bemused, the scheming Master Hacker glared indignantly at the theoretical leader of the **Equivocator's** crew. "Blake, I've been playing Checkers with Jenna all morning--"

"I beat him one game out of six," the sultry smuggler threw in with a satisfied smile.

Avon shot her a daggered glare, looking for all the world like a Skeksis with hemorrhoids, and then turned his attention back to Blake. "All right, Glory Boy, what have or haven't I done now, and if the answer is 'nothing', is that the problem?"

Blake stared at him, sorting this out, then laughed. "No, no, Avon, you haven't done anything!" he assured the confused ex-yuppie. "Except be yourself."

Vila groaned. "You're a dead man, Avon," he told the other man, toasting him farewell with the dregs of his concoction.

The computer marvel scowled at him. "Not unless this is a Tanith Lee novel." He

noticed that Cally had appeared from somewhere (speaking of Tanith Lee works... and she was smiling broadly.

Avon began to worry.

First of all, Blake was happy about something, which meant either work or bad news or both for the embezzler, and probably for Vila as well. If Cally looked happy, too, it meant that, at least for Avon, *the apocalypse had come.* "I don't follow you, Blake," he said slowly. "I also don't understand what you're on about."

The rebel legend settled himself comfortably on the fluffystuffed flight couch and absently bit at his legendary finger, causing himself some pain. "Remember those unique allergies of yours to virtually everything?"

Avon stared at him, exasperated. "Of **course** I remember them, Blake!" he thundered. "How could I possibly forget? I can only partake of nature's bounty in its purest forms," he snarled bitterly. "Impurities? Perish the thought...and perish **me**, if I encounter any of them! Yuppiefood! That's all I can stomach! Everything else in this blasted universe is totally synthetic!" He drew a long, angry breath. "Yuppiefood! The stuff would kill an aardvark! But it won't kill me, will it? I had to become a yuppie before I ever hit grammar school, just to survive! There's no other way to get the food ration cards!" He waved his arms wildly for emphasis. "That was me, the five-year-old version of Alex P. Keaton! I have to suffer with brie and yogurt and tofu and so forth and you ask me if I *remember my allergies?*" he finished, panting.

Blake stared at him.

"Yes, I do," the technician stated calmly.

"Well, worry no more," the curly haired renegade told him, gesturing at Cally, who stepped forward with a Vanna White strut. "We've solved your problems."

"That does it. I'm packing." Jenna ran off down the corridor to get her suitcases, sensing trouble. Bright girl, that one, but like the rest of them a weentsy bit too devoted to their so-called leader for her own good.

"I'll join you." Vila headed for the storeroom and its vast array of currencies. He, at least, knew how to pack properly.

"No, really," the telepath assured her comrades. "We actually have worked it out right, this time."

The odds of that being true were about as good as those of the average ice lolly surviving an all-expense-paid holiday in Hell. "Have you indeed?" Avon inquired coldly, eyeing her. He didn't trust anyone. Except perhaps Cally. And maybe Vila. And Jenna...marginally...and Blake, but only a little bit, sometimes, on alternate religious holidays.

"Avon, here. The solution to your difficulties." Blake held out his hand and the slender alien deposited something tiny in it.

"Cally's old chewing gum is going to help Avon's allergies?" Vila piped up, from where he had settled himself on the steps to watch the fun. He wanted to see the fireworks when Avon and Blake went for each other's throats.

"What?" Jenna halted in her efforts to haul her luggage to the teleport elevator and plunked herself down beside the thief.

"No, no, nothing like that," Blake laughed, and got to his feet. "Avon, do you know what these are?" He held out his hand, displaying two identical small, white capsules.

Avon inspected them from a safe distance and shook his head. "No," he admitted uneasily, backing away. This was it. Blake was really serious. He was actually fed up with all of Avon's antics and was going to kill him in plain view of the others.

No, Avon had no idea what the pills were, and he had no intention of finding out. Whatever they were, they meant bad news for him, with all his allergies. Simple aspirin knocked him out for a week solid. If these particular drugs were whipped up by Cally The-Not-Quite-Human-But-Close-Enough-for-Casting, and were supposed to end his allergies for **good**, it could only mean that they would cause his death. Any completely paranoid hayfever sufferer could see that logic.

Perspiration trickled down his pale features as the Master Hacker continued to back away from the advancing Blake. "Look," he began, stammering. "I'll, I'll go. I'll leave. J-just let me pack my things, and I'll be on my way. You can h-have your ship and your st...your starring role and everything. Even ORAC. I'll even give you his k-key." He made as if to take the roller-skate key from around his neck.

Blake was perplexed. (Not a new development.) "Avon, don't be ridiculous..."

"Take the offer, Blake!" Vila urged from the sidelines. Jenna jabbed him in the ribs to shut him up, too intrigued by the hope of another flight-deck fiasco.

"Please, Blake, you can't be serious!" Too late, Avon realized that he had backed in the wrong direction if he wanted a weapon. The wine rack, with its megawatt curling irons of assorted colors, was on the other side of the room now, beyond the other man's advancing form. "Blake, please...!" The tech found himself backed up against a console and realized he was cornered. His last chance for survival lay in an appeal to Blake's compassion--of which there was fortunately a whole big lot. The embezzler abruptly fell to his knees, basically because they buckled under him. **"I DON'T WANT TO DIE!"** he wailed.

"NEITHER DO I!" Vila howled, in sympathy for his fellow trader-of-insults and general nuisance.

"Would everyone please shut up and calm down?" Blake bellowed over the din. "Vila,

shush!" When the thief had reluctantly ceased caterwauling, Blake bent down and hauled a shaking Avon to his jack-booted feet. "Avon, you are not going to die."

"You mean the universe has to put up with him forever?" Jenna moaned, shutting her eyes in pain at the thought.

"Only if the fanzine writers are real persistent. You're not going to die because of these, Avon," the rebel legend amended. Avon was still quivering like a three-footed cat on a narrow tightrope, and in short did not look convinced. "This is a new drug, called Zaxin 4."

Avon stared dully at the tiny capsules as Cally appeared with a glass of water. "Names are cheap, Blake. They are hardly a worthwhile price for my life."

"I told you, this is a new drug. Just perfected. It counteracts everything. Well, virtually everything," he amended. "It brings dead lab rats back to life!"

The Master Hacker cringed as his Alpha stomach two-stepped away. "Dead lab rats?" he repeated, feeling nauseated. "And I'm to be a live one?"

"Well, you are something of a rat, Avon," Vila put in from the stairs. "It's just a change of location, for you."

"Quiet, Vila," the tech muttered, his gaze not moving from the pills. "Look, you would-be barricade defender, what makes you think these won't kill me?"

"We made doubly certain before we brought the originals back," Cally broke in. "Not only did we have up-to-the-minute machinery create them before we blew up the complex, we went to the locals and they had a powerful warlock and his coven put a spell on them to make sure they work right."

The leather-clad man put his head in his hands. "Oh, no..."

"Go ahead and try them," Blake encouraged amiably. "What could it hurt?"

The embezzler gaped at him in disbelief. **"Me!** That's what it could hurt!"

"Avon, please." Cally looked pleadingly at him. "You know we wouldn't do anything to hurt you. You know I wouldn't."

"This from the man who sends me out on missions that would get Rambo shredded." Avon glared into Blake's damnably honest, earnest brown eyes for a long moment and finally spoke, grudgingly. "All right...but remember, if I die, it's on your conscience, Blake, and knowing your conscience it will remind you every day of your life that you are guilty, guilty, guilty, **guilty** of **murder!**"

Blake smiled reassuringly and handed him the capsules.

Jaw set, the wary tech took the glass of water from Cally. "Omit flowers," he requested, and slugged down the pills.

* * * * * * *

Two hours later, Avon was still on his feet, much to his and everyone else's vast surprise. He actually felt pretty good, considering he expected to keel over like a sunstruck beach crab at any moment. The Master Hacker finished off the last of a drink and continued to check readouts, humming lightly to himself.

Ten minutes later, Blake picked up the black-clad tech's mug from where it rested on top of the radar screen, obscuring half an attack formation. Avon glanced up at him with cold brown eyes. "What is it now?"

"Do you realize what you just did?" Blake grinned broadly.

The other considered. "No."

The rebel legend waved the empty mug at him joyfully. "You just drank a whole cup of black coffee, and you're still calm!"

Avon snatched the mug from him and stared wide-eyed at the dregs at its bottom. "Hey...I did, didn't I?" He beamed at Blake. "Well, I'll be damned!"

"You probably will," remarked Jenna from her station.

"Don't knock it, cutie, you'll probably be my next-door neighbor in Hell," the tech returned smoothly, still smiling. "Neat!" he declared. "I don't believe it!"

"Neither do I," Vila interrupted. If Avon wasn't going to be cynical, someone had to be, or the whole conversation equilibrium of the crew was going to go to pieces. "It'll never last," he continued, in funereal tones. "Wait a few minutes and he'll flip out again, same as usual."

Avon frowned. "I never 'flip out'," he mumbled, chewing on a thumbnail as he worried about flipping out again.

"Don't worry," Blake instructed.

"You're telling **him** not to worry?" Jenna murmured, amused. "That's a bit like telling Vila not to get soused, or Cally not to think so loudly!"

"Sorry," Cally apologized, mentally turning down the volume.

"Urhmm," the slender embezzler muttered, still concerned. Absently, he reached up to Jenna's console and took a handful of crackers from the open box resting there. He munched them down, still looking bemused.

"Avon," Blake said after five minutes had passed and two major battles for their lives had been fought and survived.

"What?" The dark-haired man was still munching crackers, though he had moved to the forcewall, which was strewn with crumbs.

"What are you eating?"

"Just Jenna's crackers," Avon told him, chewing a handful.

Jenna grabbed the box and peered into it. "You little sneak! They're half gone!" She shook the container, which was almost empty. "I ought to string you up by your gizzard and cut you into little Kerrlets!"

"All that over a box of Wheat Thins?" Vila chuckled, then looked up sharply. "Hey, wait a minute! He's eating Wheat Thins, and he's still himself?"

"Well, of course I'm still myself, Vila," Avon growled. "Who else would I be?"

"Usually, your schizophrenia goes through the roof from the crackers and you end up wandering around telling everybody you're a college student from Bwahston and you have a monster term paper on William Butler Yates due on Thursday," the thief answered.

The tech frowned at this ugly picture, looking to Blake. "Is it **true**?"

"Oh, now, don't let's start all **that** again!" The rebel legend raised his hands for silence. "No one could ever take your place, Avon," he reassured the agitated computer wizard.

"Oh, sure, someone could," Vila burst in. "There's always the Borgias."

"You leave my ancestors out of this!" Avon grumbled.

Blake's jaw hit the floor and rebounded with a loud springy sound. "You're related to the Borgias?" he gasped. Somehow, he didn't think that that particular bloodline was accepted by Good and Decent Rebel Ethics.

"Of course I am," the Master Hacker announced, enjoying watching Blake squirm in moral horror. "This sort of bitchy, high-handed, omniscient state of dictatorial bastard-dom doesn't come in cans, you know. It takes years of practice...and genetic coding." Avon had other genetic secrets, too, but he decided not to mention that he was part teddy bear.

"I should have guessed," Blake moaned, but he couldn't very well abandon his computer expert by this point. The fans would riot.

He decided to change the subject and clapped his hands to muster cheer. "Well, anyhow, Avon, that's two strange things you've eaten in fifteen minutes, now, and you're still on your feet!"

"True," the embezzler admitted slowly. Blake was right...and he'd never stop talking about it, knowing him. "Of course, you only brought the two capsules, correct?"

"Originally, yes," Cally responded.

"I knew it! You screwed up again!" Avon rolled his eyes, shaking his head. "You get my hopes up as high as the stars and then you dash them, tragically, to dust--"

Blake interrupted the sudden outburst of melodrama. "But we had Zen and ORAC come up with clones of the originals."

"What?" Avon goggled at him. "How did you manage that? The computers hate you! I **programmed** them to hate--er, that is, they don't respond to you at all well!"

"I asked them nicely, and they did what I wanted them to do," Cally informed him with an angelic smile.

"I see." He'd have to have a talk with those traitorous machines. It was bad enough **he** was getting **sweet** on Cally; the machinery didn't have to back him up in his stupidity. "So we have an essentially limitless supply of Zaxin 4?"

"Sounds like it to me," Jenna said, smiling. "I think you're cured, Avon! We should celebrate!" *Any excuse for a party!*

"Why Jenna, what a marvelous idea!" Blake grabbed her and then caught hold of Cally's tunic. "Listen, you two whip up a banquet for five, and we'll all have a royal feast tonight! All right?"

He touched me. He noticed I'm alive. "All right, Jenna agreed dreamily, following Cally out the door.

"Good deal," Vila acknowledged, getting out of his station and heading for the liquor stores. "I'll take care of the wine list."

Blake rolled his eyes. "Don't you always?"

* * * * * * *

Dinner was an experience. It couldn't be quite termed an ordeal, but they had to split **hairs** over definitions to be sure.

Blake **managed** to coax Avon into the dining room with a lot of help and mental encouragement on Cally's part. Rather reluctantly, the computer expert settled himself in his chair and carefully tucked his napkin into his collar. "Blake, I don't know about this. Why push my luck?"

"I thought you were pushing your luck just staying aboard," the taller rebel threw back merrily.

"I am," the Master Hacker agreed, "but it occurs to me that this may be suicide, and that this may literally be my last supper."

"That's all right, Judas was at that one," Vila told him, gulping at some wine. "I think."

"Would everyone **please** stay off the subject of my ancestors?" Avon shot him a look, then returned his worried gaze to the rebel legend hovering over him. "I really don't know--"

"Then find out," Blake proposed, finally backing off and seating himself near the others. "Consider this a great experiment."

That did it. Little lights ignited in Avon's eyes at the thought of scientific discovery. "All right, but if I die because of this I'm going to haunt you for the rest of your life," he threatened.

Blake raised his eyebrows in amusement. "Don't you already?"

"No, that's the other one," Vila informed him, settling down across the table. "The weird one, with the limp."

Jenna and Cally appeared and set down the last of the steaming platters. "All set?" the smuggler asked.

The menfolk nodded. Avon vaulted out of his seat to pull Cally's chair out and seat her properly, then left Jenna standing where she was and returned to his own place.

"Thanks very much," the blonde woman grumbled, lifting covers off of steaming dishes as she sat down. "There you go, people. Eat hearty!"

Blake grinned and dug in, sawing off half of the nearest steak and plopping it and an army of mushrooms onto his platter. Vila chopped off bits of a gigantic slab of meat for himself and for the girls, then raised an eyebrow at Avon, who took a deep breath and nodded once. "Might as well."

The thief smiled reassuringly and shuttled a small slice of meat over to the Master Hacker, along with a few mushrooms, some cranberry sauce, an artichoke, a bit of liver, a yam, a sprig of parsley, some onions and a slice of chocolate cake. It didn't quite all fit neatly on the plate, so the pickpocket simply piled it all up like a mountain, and Avon was obliged to search for the plate by layers.

About ten minutes later, Avon's plate was empty. Blake was reaching for more steak when a ginsu knife whistled by his outstretched hand and thudded home into the meat. The tech held up a gadget and some fishing line and reeled in the rest of the steak, which was quite rare and very bloody...which seemed to be just how he liked it.

"Well, you seem to be doing all right," the rebel leader commented approvingly, looking at the several empty platters--all of which had been within Avon's reach. "Would you like anything else?"

The other renegade handed him his plate. "Just start piling until it doesn't fit," he directed, as the others looked on in amazement and mild stomach unrest. "I've never had any of this stuff before! It's really good!" He paused to swallow a couple of marshmallows. "You have no idea how wonderful all this tastes after decades of nothing but that terrible, bland yuppie food!" he grinned at Cally and Jenna. "You two are just incredible," he told them sincerely. "I mean, all of this...it's just wonderful. Really." He tilted his head sagely. "Do you know, I have never eaten a Twinkie?"

Jenna almost fainted. Somewhere in there had been a compliment from Avon, which was almost unheard of. Of course, if she had had to grow up without any sort of junk food, she supposed **she** would have short-circuited, too.

Cally smiled happily and continued on with her dinner. *Avon noticed me. At last.* (Of course, Avon **was** drugged.)

Blake paused as he spooned things onto Avon's plate. "Liverwurst?"

"By all means," the tech agreed.

"Peanut butter?"

"Just dump it on the liverwurst."

The rebel legend looked a bit ill. "Brussel sprouts?"

"Fine with me. They're kind of cute."

"Maple syrup?"

Avon nodded. "Sounds good."

"Beets?"

The embezzler made a face. "Beets are yucky."

"Avon, I don't think you've even tried them," the rebel leader began.

"I don't care. They're still yucky," the Master Hacker declared stubbornly, eyeing the burgundy slices with mistrust. "Beets are yucky. They look yucky. They act yucky. They **are** yucky."

"Well, why not try them?" Blake asked sensibly. "You never know, you might like them.

"You're not eating them, I notice."

"I only just saw them," the other informed him, bypassing the beets for the moment and adding half a pound of sushi to the odd collection of edibles on his computer expert's plate. "I was going to have some in a moment."

"Oh, suuurrre you were." Avon leaned over. "Vila," he whispered. "Are beets yucky?"

"Absolutely," the pickpocket told him, slurping at some tangerine-and-garlic wine. "Very yucky," he added, weaving slightly in his chair.

"I knew it," the tech intoned darkly, and turned back to Blake. "Everything but the beets."

The rebel leader nodded, tucked a few beets under the sushi and passed the plate back. The mountain of food was devoured in less than five minutes...all but the beets, who looked lonesome.

"They're still yucky, no matter what you do to them," Avon told him defiantly. He might be stuck on this alien spacecraft, following the mobile loony bin into thousands of dangerous adventures which could get him diced, sliced, and julienne fried, defying a

massive empire which sprawled over half the known galaxy, but **nothing** could induce him to eat beets. "Anything else left?"

Blake scanned the ransacked table, which bore a striking resemblance to Tokyo after Godzilla finished his morning constitutional. It was almost like having Gan back on board. "Nothing," he reported in amazement. "Not a crumb."

"Fine, old boy," Vila piped up, flinging an arm across the technician's shoulders. "Avon, you ever been drunk?"

"Well, I've been told I have, but I can never remember," Avon replied, amused by the thief's wavering joviality.

"Well, then!" Vila got to his feet, pulling the other with him. "This is a situation that must be remedied! To the liquor stores!"

"Okay," Avon agreed, laughing. He felt very full and mellow and rather fluffy, being so well fed for the first time in his life.

Jenna and Cally watched them go, then looked cunningly at Blake.

For once, he noticed. "What is it, girls?"

"Well, we did all the cooking," Cally commenced.

"And we did all the serving and setting the table and all," Jenna went on.

"So we thought it would be a nice idea if you did all the dishes." Cally threw an apron across the table at him. Blake looked with trepidation at the little hearts and butterflies embroidered thereon, then nodded and tied it neatly around his waist. "Fair's fair," he announced, and set to work clearing off the table.

Jenna and Cally shook hands behind his back. "Told you he'd fall for it," the Reagan-ron woman giggled, and they wandered off together to watch the evening soap operas.

* * * * * * *

About two hours later, Vila was gazing blearily at Avon from the midst of a pile of empty bottles. The technician was performing his own versions of the California Raisins' Greatest Hits, weaving his way in little hops around the room. "Avon, y'know what?"

The other grinned inanely, clutching at a half-full bottle of cherry-and-cream-cheese vodka as he halted in his dance. "What?"

"I think you're sozzled," the thief proclaimed, and laughed hysterically at this amusing fact.

"Know what?"

"What?" (This was definitely not a Pulitzer-winning conversation.)

"So're you." Avon fell over onto his side, rolling on the floor in helpless merriment. "I don't believe this," he squeaked. "I feel like a Doctor Who special effect!"

"You look it." Vila toasted him and went back to his beloved booze.

"Yeah," the fallen embezzler replied, his eyes spinning in their sockets. "This is great," he giggled. Abruptly, he stopped and looked confused. "Vila? Why are my bones Jell-o?"

"'Because **we** like you'," the pickpocket quoted, taking another slug and keeling over. "'M-I-C-'"

"'K-E-Y'," Avon added, eyes sparkling.

"'M-O-U-S-E'!" they finished together, sending themselves into hysterics.

Things went on thusly for about another hour, at which point Blake reappeared from his battle with the dishes. (He had won, but only just.) The rebel legend stared in disapproval at his two associates. Vila was sprawled on the floor, arms wrapped tightly around a bottle. Avon was draped upright against a cabinet, balancing precariously on a little stool; he had fallen asleep reaching for the pistachio sherry.

With a sigh, Blake picked up Vila and trudged away down the corridor, depositing the thief in his cabin to sleep it off. He returned shortly and hauled Avon off to the ex-yuppie's own room to recuperate, tucking the Master Hack in and placing Mister Bennington on the pillow beside him. Avon immediately grabbed hold of the large fuschia teddy bear and wrapped the stuffed animal in a killer embrace, sleeping soundly all the while. Blake had to smile as he tiptoed out and shut the door softly on the sound of Avon's steady snores.

Jenna and Cally turned up just after this task was completed. "So, are they both completely insensible, or what?" the smuggler inquired.

Blake nodded seriously. "Both of them sound asleep. I don't think they'll wake up until next week."

"Pay up." The smuggler held out her hand. Cally dropped twenty credits into it.

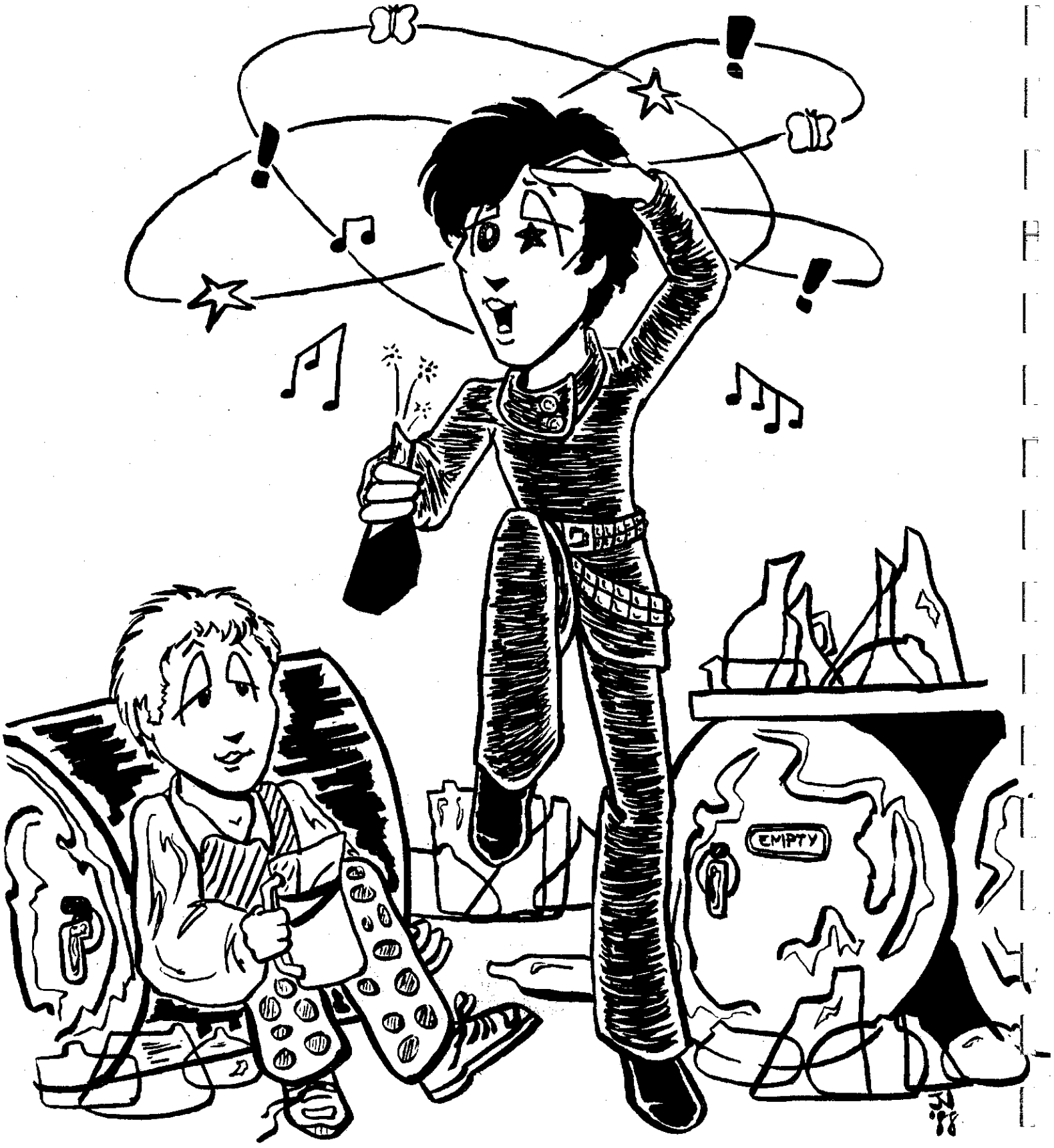
"Poor Avon." Blake shook his head in dismay.

"Why 'poor Avon'?" Cally frowned in puzzlement. "He's recovered! The Zaxin 4 gives him a tolerance for just about anything for a period of twenty-four hours! It even seems to have a side effect of making him much easier to get along with! If he keeps a steady supply on hand, he'll be absolutely fine! Normal!"

"I wouldn't go that far," Jenna smirked. "What Blake means is that Avon's never been really drunk before in his entire life."

"So?"

"So, he's going to experience his very first bona-fide hangover ever...and it's going


EMPTY

to be a beauty," the former space pirate explained, glancing into the decimated liquor stores. "It **won't** be pretty."

"Avon with a vicious hangover," Blake mused unhappily. "I think I'll stay in bed tomorrow."

"**He** will," the pilot guaranteed.

"Well, at least the drugs worked," Cally spoke up brightly. "Avon has been able to enjoy himself completely tonight. I think we have done a nice and beautiful and touching thing."

"Yes," Blake agreed, while Jenna rolled her eyes at all the sentiment in the air. "Now all we have to do is find a fast diet."

"What?" The telepath looked confused, a typical expression for her.

"If Avon's going to keep eating like that, he's going to gain an awful lot of weight," the rebel leader explained.

Jenna shook her green-streaked hair out of her eyes. "Knowing him, he's probably got a metabolism like an ion drive."

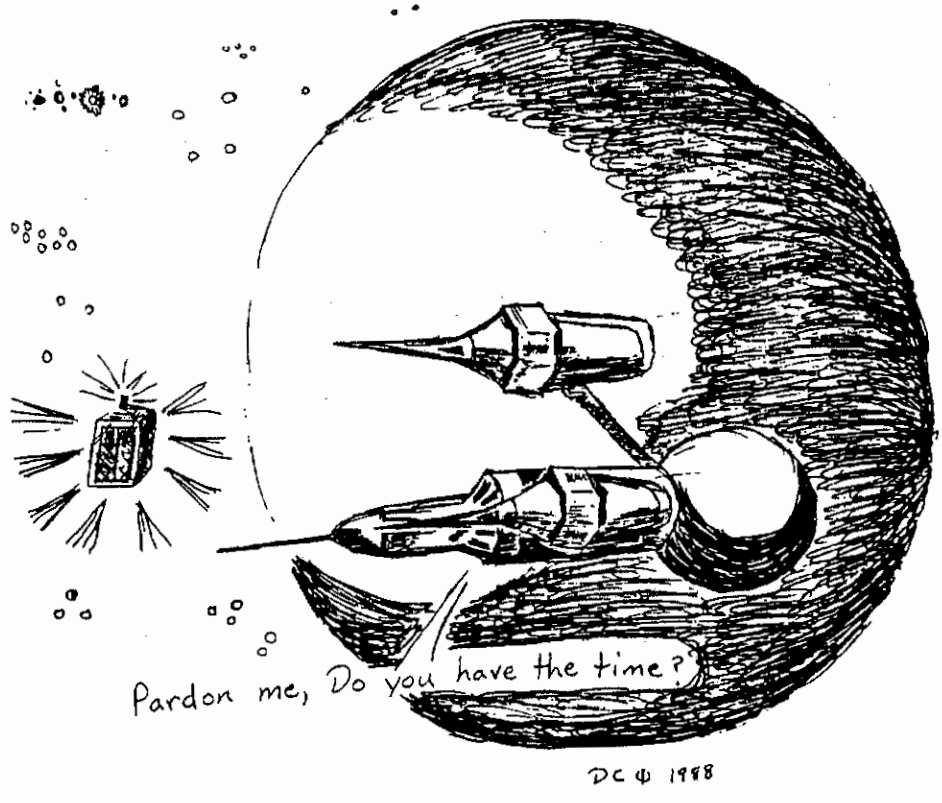
Blake sighed. "I hope you're right."

Cally was lost again--the effect of one too many soap opera plots in one night upon her too-receptive brain. "Why?"

"Because we need every member of this crew to be in decent shape to fight the great revolution," Blake stated for the thirty-eighth time that week.

"Besides," he added with a wicked grin, "can you imagine a wanted poster for 'Waddles' Avon?!"

FIN DE L'EPISODE



Snowbank

by Kim McCarthy

It snowed three inches last night.
Today the sun's trying to shine.
Typical early spring weather up here.
Myal's finally running out of complaints.
Neither one of us is used to deep snow.
It hasn't exactly been easy travelling on foot.
The hardships have brought out personal revelations.
It's beginning to look as though our whole partnership
Was as bad an idea as this trip.
Knowing the truth about me, Myal now laughs at my limp,
And the puffs of air I exhale.
He asks why I bother when we're alone.
They are traits I can't change. A disguise I can't drop.
Or possibly, more realistically, won't.
He chuckles. I fume.
Myal now plays only a guitar with one head and no pipe.
He was not trained to the vintage guitar.
His musical genius has been damaged.
He rails against every awkward mistake.
I chuckle. He fumes.
We snarl over meals.
We both have unanswered questions
And doubts.
Ahead, there is work for me.
A truly dangerous ghost.
I don't know if I can kill any more.
Myal fears I cannot.
My guilty soul wants final release.
If Myal dies I am free.
Myal still tries to trust me.
I'm not sure he should.

We happen across some townspeople cutting wood.
Someone is sure to know which road we should take.
Myal spies two children ice-skating on a nearby pond.
He begs off, drawn to their joy.
As usual, leaving me to the work.
The people are disquieted by my presence.
It was easy to scoff at the legends of the King of Swords,
Until I stared them in the face.
I have been used to this since my occupation began.
I wait casually for them to decide on a mood.
I'm certain I know their very next sentence.
And then...
I sense the ice shatter. I feel Myal's scream.
With a sharp command to get help, I am gone.
I shed my heavy mantle on the hilltop,
And tumble down the steep snowbank, cursing my limp.
The trait I can't change.

Myal and the children have vanished, replaced by a hole.
I focus on my link's fading panic and dive.
Myal weighs half a ton as I haul him out.
The ice splinters under my feet.
In desperation I surrender to my forbidden half,
Dispersing my weight while retaining the much-vaunted strength
Of a ghost.
Myal is not breathing.
I blow warming air into his lungs.
The puffs that he laughed at hopefully will now save his life.
Myal's heart flutters instead,
And with it my entire body.
I recognize the white moths of a dying undead.
So this is what I've done to hundreds of others?
I never dreamed how frightening this sensation is.
Furiously I concentrate on forcing Myal to breathe,
Adding some of my magic and life fire as well.
Perhaps I am only struggling to save my link,
Like all those ghosts before me.
Perhaps.
But all I can think of is that if I lose,
Myal will not live again.
So I fight.
His first gasp sends a wave of solidity back into my body.
His whining moan is even sweeter to my ears than his songs.
He's complaining already.
I sit him up so he may expell any water,
While I stagger light-headed back into the pond.
I repeat the process.
It takes more of my fire.
The children are worse than Myal was,
And my head spins like a red maple seed,
But I am nothing if not stubborn.
I will not give up.
By the time the men come,
Two bawling, retching children lie on the snowbank,
Next to a shivering Myal,
And a faint deadalive too exhausted to puff.
They seem not to notice that as they carry me away.
Unconscious, I draw on my bearers.
Myal covers my deed with chattering nonsense.
They blame the odd chills on the cold.

Three days later we depart.
The entire town bids us farewell.
I have created a new legend:
The King of Swords breathed life into two dying children.
Actually, I learned the trick from a charlatan faith-healer.
But everyone knows how these things go.
Myal has it half-composed into a song already.
My intended job still awaits us.
How that will turn out I cannot guess.
Myal still needs help with that wretched guitar.
I puff and I limp.
We snarl over meals.
But our questions are gone.

A CHOICE CUT OF FOOL

by Kathy Hintze

art by Adrian Morgan & Annita Smith

"Let us know when you're ready to leave," Tarrant said to Vila.

Avon gave him a short nod, then activated his teleport bracelet. "Bring us up, ORAC."

"What makes you think he will come back?" Cally asked Avon. She had waited for Tarrant and Dayna to leave to save the young pilot from saying something he'd soon regret.

Avon paused, wondering at her question. With Cally, such things were not always mere words. Her alien capabilities could oftimes pick up things better left unsaid. "Vila is a survivor," he advised. "On that planet he found, he would have to work. Vila does not like to work." He sat down behind the teleport, certain that the thief would be calling in at any time.

"You're forgetting Kerril, Avon. He seemed quite fond of her."

"Vila is fond of any female," Avon snorted with a faint smile.

"True," Cally agreed. "But I sensed he felt something more for this woman."

"Was it enough to convince him to stay with her?" Avon asked, suddenly watching her intently.

"I am not sure. What I felt could have been mere concern for her, but..."

"But you're not sure," Avon returned, relaxing a bit. If Cally wasn't sure, then it might not mean anything. He stood up and decided to go to the flight deck and see how much more he could harass Tarrant. The damned young idiot might well have led them all into a trap, and he was not about to let Tarrant off with one mere hand-slapping.

When Avon arrived there, Dayna broke off what she was saying. He hadn't caught all of it, but it was evident she was quite upset with Tarrant. Surely she didn't care for the thief as well.

"Am I interrupting something?" Avon enquired in a solicitous tone.

"No," Tarrant spat, his eyes snapping at Dayna. "Has Vila come up yet?"

My, my, what did I miss? Avon wondered to himself. "No, not yet. Worried, Tarrant?"

"Aren't you, Avon? After all, without your precious thief, you're out of luck if Blake should be in a Federation security cell."

"Tarrant!" Dayna half-rose in her chair, but the icy look Avon gave Tarrant set her right back down."

"I don't need any of you, Tarrant. Nor do I need Blake."

"Then why all this running about every time ORAC picks up some mention of him?"

"That is my concern. Yours is to pilot this vessel. A skill anyone can master. Dayna, I'm sure, could manage with Zen's assistance."

"Fine. Let her, then. I'm sick and tired of all of you." He stomped off the flight deck.

Avon gazed after him, mildly surprised. "Tarrant must be suffering from an extreme attack of conscience," he surmised.

"Avon, why do you do that?"

"Dayna, do not try my patience with empty questions."

"Oh, you're as thick-headed as Tarrant," she exclaimed and headed out the opposite corridor Tarrant had taken.

"I do wish I had come in at the beginning of whatever that was about," he mused to himself. He activated the ship's intercom and punched up the teleport station. "Anything yet, Cally?"

"Nothing, Avon. Do you think he's all right?"

"I shouldn't want to bring him up if he's, uh, involved with other things, Cally. We'll give him another few minutes, then inform him we're leaving. He'll be ready then, I assure you."

Avon closed down the intercom and sat at his station, his fingers drumming a soundless beat on the console. A voice at the back of his brain kept telling him *perhaps Vila will not come back.* After all, what was there here for him? Safely? Hardly, if what had nearly happened was any proof. Vila would have to be a fool to believe that. *And he is not that.* Avon unconsciously nodded. He knew full well that Vila was neither the fool he played nor as drunk as he often appeared. He had kept a careful eye on the ship's liquor cabinet as well as forbidding Zen from making any inordinate amounts of the mixture Vila liked so well, soma.

What then was there to keep him? Loyalty? Hardly. Vila's loyalty lay with the winner, and Avon could scarcely blame him for it. In the Delta Domes, or for that matter anywhere in the Federation, it was always the wiser of the two.

The intercom chimed. "Avon?"

"What is it, Cally?"
"Vila's called for teleport. He sounds in trouble."
"Bring him up, Cally. Now!" He headed for the teleport on the run.

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Dayna was headed back for the flight deck when she spied Avon. "What's the matter, Avon?" Avon said nothing, just sped on by. "Damn, something must have happened to Vila," she mumbled under her breath and headed after him.

Tarrant heard the commotion and poked his head out his cabin just as Dayna went by. "What's..."

"Don't know. Come on."

Tarrant joined in the rush. When he and Dayna arrived, Vila was leaning against the teleport console, breathing heavily and shaking with fear.

"I told him not to do it," Vila muttered. "Stupid man, very stupid man. Brought the complex down on top of himself."

"Did Kerril make it all right?" Cally asked gently.

"Must have done," Vila replied. He took a deep breath to steady himself. It had been too close a thing down there. "The barrier came back up. Nori and Kerril had to have crossed onto the planet to do that. At least, I hope so."

"I'm sure she's all right, Vila," Dayna said in comfort.

"Hope so."

"I'm sure she's safe, Vila."

Vila lifted his head and looked at Avon. Something was in the other man's eyes, relief that he had come back? Well, what else could he have done, given the circumstances? Still, there had been time. He could have jumped through the opening and maybe made it to Homeworld. Their world, his and Kerril's. Maybe they would name it Vilaworld after him. Maybe. He sighed. So many maybes which now would never be.

"Vila, I'm sorry."

Tarrant's words shattered Vila's image of Kerril laughing and holding out her arms for him. "That makes it all worthwhile, doesn't it?" the thief mumbled.

"We're still out the crystals," someone grumbled. Who, Vila wasn't sure. He took out the handful he had collected on the planet and plopped them on the console.

Avon collected them, his eyes still resting on the thief. "I'm impressed," he said with no hint of mockery in his voice and left.

"Hmmm," Vila mumbled back.

"I'm glad you stayed," Cally told him, giving him a quick hug.

Vila's melancholy lifted slightly and he managed to smile. "Glad somebody's happy."

"So is Avon."

"Who cares what Avon thinks," Vila sighed. "Who cares what I think? Who cares about anything!" He left for his cabin.

Cally looked after him and shook her head. She had been right. Vila had felt something for Kerril, and now she was lost to him.

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Avon felt eyes staring at him and turned about. Vila Restal was standing in the doorway, eyes partially glazed, no doubt by the rather large and half-consumed glass of soma in his hand.

"Well?" Avon inquired.

"Just wondered what you were doin'," the thief replied in a slurry voice.

"I thought this was your watch period." Avon stood up and stretched. He had been working at the installation of the crystals for nearly six hours.

"Dayna told me to go away so I went." Vila giggled suddenly and sat straight down on the floor.

He's never been this drunk before, Avon realized. "Vila, what are you doing?"

"Doing? Nothing. Same as I'm always doing when I'm not opening things or getting shot at or being used as bait or..."

"I get the picture," Avon interrupted with a frown. Surely what had happened on Keezarn had not brought this about. No, surely it couldn't be that.

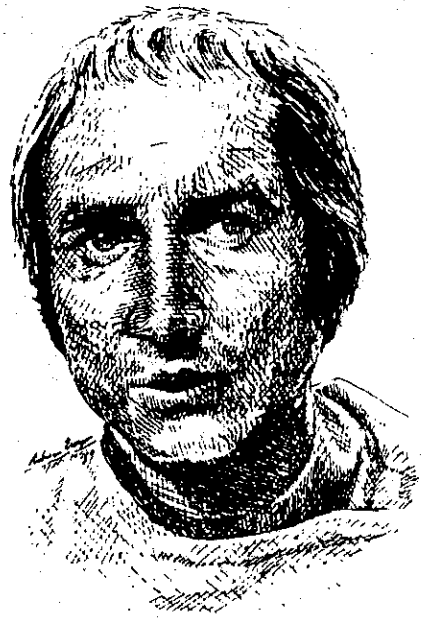
"So there you are," Cally's voice announced from the corridor. A minute later and she peered at Avon. "Has he been pestering you, Avon?" she asked, helping the thief to his feet. At the same time, she sent Avon a telepathic message. *Dayna called me. Vila was acting very strange when she came to the flight deck. That's why she relieved him.*

Avon blinked in acknowledgement and then stared intently at the thief. Something was definitely not right. "No, he just arrived."

"Come on, Vila. Let's get you to your cabin." Cally put an arm around his waist to help support him.

The thief giggled again, then went very solemn. "Don't do anything but cause trouble, do I, Cally? Don't deserve any cabin. Don't deserve anything!" He burst into tears.

Cally didn't know what to make of that. A glance at Avon told her he didn't either. "Hush now. You're tired, that's all. Things will look better after you've slept."



"Nothing look better. Maybe Tarrant was right. No one cares what happens to me. No one." He ventured a teary-eyed look at Cally. "'cept maybe you, Cally." The tears began again.

"Let's get him to his cabin," Avon advised.

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"Stay with him, Avon, while I get something from the medical unit."

"Is it wise to give him anything while he's drunk?" Avon asked.

"What I have in mind will not harm him."

"Wish...wish Cally was my girl," Vila mourned, looking up at Avon. His eyes were now almost entirely glassy.

Avon said nothing in return, merely waited for Cally.

"But...but she's not. She belongs to you, Avon. I know that. Everybody knows that."

"Cally belongs to no one," Avon denied.

"Huh! She...she does so." Vila hiccuped noisily. "Don't you, Cally?"

Avon glanced over his shoulder. Cally had paused inside the doorway, caught off-guard no doubt by Vila's drunken remark. At least that was the impression he received by the strange look on her face.

"This will help you sleep, Vila, and when you wake up, you will be yourself again."

"Never be myself again," the thief muttered, trying to sit up. Avon forced himself back down. "Let me go, Avon, please. Don't keep me here. If I stay, I'll die."

"Don't be ridiculous," Cally informed him. She injected him with what she'd brought from the medical unit.

"Will...will so." The thief's voice faded and he was asleep.

"How long will that keep him out?" Avon inquired, pausing in the doorway to look back in at the sleeping thief.

"Eight hours," Cally reported. "Why? What is it?"

"I'm not sure, Cally."

"If it's what Vila said, Avon, don't let it bother you. I know it is not true."

Avon refused to comment on it.

"Then what?"

"I don't know," Avon muttered. He could not put what he was feeling into words, as it was something he'd never experienced before.

"You sensed something about him, didn't you?"

Avon with obvious reluctance nodded.

"Avon, I have been sensing something since Vila teleported back up from Keezarn."

"And you said nothing?"

"What could I say? It was so vague an impression, I put it down to worry over Vila."

Avon accepted that. "What did you sense, Cally?"

"He is very unhappy, Avon. He wants to leave, but he's too frightened to do so."

"Quite sensible, considering what would happen if Servalan caught up with him," Avon returned.

"Avon, he is afraid!"

"Of what, Cally?"

"I don't know," Cally replied, feeling helpless.

"Cally, Vila has always been afraid, for as long as I've known him, he's been afraid."

"Not like this, Avon. This is more than fear. It borders on self-destruction."

That got Avon's attention immediately. "I think you misinterpret what you feel, Cally. Vila would no more suicide than I would."

Cally stared intently at Avon. "Would you risk being captured by Servalan, Avon?"

Avon stared right back, answering without hesitation, "Not if I could prevent it, no."

"Even if it meant suicide?"

Avon answered a bit slower this time. "Perhaps. It would depend on the circumstances."

"Why don't you admit it, Avon? You'd prefer being a prisoner than being dead."

"Most sane people would," he returned. "What are you getting at, Cally?"

"Vila would not let himself be taken, Avon. He would rather die."

"You're being a little melodramatic, don't you think? Vila has been 'taken', as you call it, on a number of occasions. Have you forgotten Horizon?"

"That's not what I mean, Avon, you know that!"

Avon frowned at her. He was tired and in no mood to argue with Cally over Vila's drunken ravings. "I'm tired," he stated. "I'm going to bed. If you'll take my advice, you'll do the same." He turned to leave, but Cally stopped him with a touch on the arm.

"We cannot pass this off, Avon. You know we can't."

Avon glanced back at Vila and shrugged. "We'll see how he is in the morning." He rubbed his eyes. "Hopefully, we'll all have a clear head then."

"But one of us will also have a terrible headache," Cally added with a sudden mischievous smile.

Avon smiled too. "Yes, he will, won't he?"

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Vila woke up with more than a mere headache. In fact, his head woke him up with an angry roar which frightened him into consciousness. A few seconds later, he realized what it was and let out a horrible groan which only added to his pain.

"It's...it's...ow, quit it, will you?" he moaned to the shower. He stepped into the stall and turned on the water, letting it drench him, clothes and all, in its cold fury. It did not drive away the pain, however. And he staggered back into the room flinching at every step. *Surely goosebumpies aian't hurt like that all the time,* he wondered, as he started to shiver from the cold. At least he'd never noticed them hurting before.

"And how are we this morning?" Cally's greeting sounded like she was using an amplifier the size of his cabin.

"Please," he begged in a half-whisper, "please don't shout."

I'm not... Telepathy made him grimace in agony and she quickly finished aloud. "I'm not shouting, Vila."

He nodded carefully, half afraid his brain might choose this particular moment to try an escape. It certainly felt as if it was trying to beat its way out using everything from a concentrated forcewall to one of Dayna's explosives.

"What...what happened? Did we get caught by Servalan?" Cally's face wasn't really green, was it? He blinked and the green disappeared. *Must have been on the inside of my eyes,* he decided.

"No, Vila," the Auron replied quietly in an amused tone. It was very apparent that Vila remembered nothing of the last eight hours. "I think you did a little celebrating, that's all."

"Celebrating?" He started to scratch his head and immediately stopped, jerking his hand in front of his face. When was the last time he had cut his fingernails? They seemed so long and sharp. "Me?"

"What's the matter, Vila?"

"Nothing. Guess I'm just really supersensitive this morning, all over it appears."

"Well, here's something that should help." She held out a glass of pale blue liquid.

"What is it?" he asked, hesitating. The very colour of the stuff sent his stomach into a frenzy.

"Something to ease your headache."

Vila took the glass in a shaking hand and started to drink from it. As it touched his lips, he froze, staring at Cally. She <u>was</u> green! In fact, she was fast becoming more than that. Her face was swelling all out of proportion, and her eyes had acquired a sudden burning intensity which terrified him to his soul. He dropped the glass and backed away from her.

"Vila, what is it?" she asked, taking a step towards him.

"No, get back!" he screamed. "Whatever you are, go away! Leave me alone." He crawled as far into the wall as he could and covered his head. A claw touched him, sending shivers of terror through his body. "No, don't hurt me. Please!"

Cally withdrew her hand and stepped back. What was wrong with Vila? Why was he acting the way he was? Then she felt it, the aura she had sensed at Keezarn. The faint trace of something which had engulfed Vila before he had teleported down. Fear, no, sheer terror held the thief in its grasp and she did not know what was causing it.

Avon, you must come to Vila's cabin at once!

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Avon was at that moment engaged in a rather heated argument with Tarrant and snarled aloud, "Not now, Cally, I've no time."

"Cally? Avon, what are you talking about?" Dayna had been privy to the uproar since she had been on the flight deck at the time Avon arrived. She had deemed it better to remain to keep a watchful eye on Tarrant, since he had more times than not of late managed to put his foot in his mouth in front of Avon.

Avon glared at her, then at Tarrant. "Nothing, damn it. Stay on this heading, Tarrant. I'll be back!" He walked stiffly off the flight deck and far enough down the corridor so he wouldn't be seen, then ran for Vila's cabin.

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"What was all that about?" Tarrant demanded angrily.

"Don't shout at me, Tarrant," Dayna snapped back. "I'm not mad at you." She paused, pursing her lips. "Yet!"

Tarrant took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Sorry. Avon makes me so damn angry that I could almost kill him." He clenched his fists in exasperation.

"Me, too," Dayna chuckled. "But don't let it get to you. It only makes him worse. Or hadn't you noticed?"

Tarrant glared at her, then snorted. "I guess I hadn't, now that you mention it." He stood up and walked over to her, bending down to look her squarely in the eyes. "Thanks for watching my back, by the way."

"Is that what I was doing?" Dayna asked him in all innocence.

"Dayna, you can be almost as irritating as Avon, do you know that?"

Dayna smiled and winked at him. "Thanks."

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Avon heard screams from within Vila's cabin and quickly opened the door. Cally turned as he entered, looking both puzzled and worried.

"What's the matter with him?" Avon demanded.

"I don't know. I came in and found him suffering from his hangover and brought him something to ease the pain. He took the glass, then screamed and crawled into that corner. He's not moved since."

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'Not moved' was not exactly true, since the thief was moving, every inch of him was moving in terror. Vila heard the door to his cabin open and ventured a look. Something else had entered, a black-headed demon with cold black eyes. The eyes caught his and held him trapped.

"Vila, what is it?" it growled. "What is the matter with you?"

"No," Vila whimpered. "Please, please let me go. Please, please."

The demon blinked, releasing the thief from its horrible spell and Vila quickly ducked his head back under the protection of his arms.

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"Avon, there's something else. The feeling I had when he came back from Keezarn, it's here. I can feel it now."

"Where is it, Cally?" He stared hard at the cringing thief but saw nothing.

"It is there, surrounding Vila. Avon, what do we do?"

A very good question, he thought to himself. Obviously, he had to do something, but how did one fight something intangible and invisible?

"I don't know," he advised, without turning to look at her. Vila's cries had softened now to sobs, he had to be nearing exhaustion. "Has there been any fluctuation in the 'aura'?"

"None that I can sense. It seems to have gotten stronger, in fact."

"And Vila weaker."

"You think it is draining him?"

"I'm not certain. I think we should withdraw and consult ORAC."

"But Avon, we can't leave him like this."

"I did not say we would, Cally." Avon turned to face her. "But our presence here might harm him more." He took her gently by the arm and steered her to the doorway.

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Vila heard the door slide shut and dared to peek out from under his arms. Alone, he was alone. The horrible monsters were gone. Vila started to relax, then caught himself. They might come back. He hurried to the door, popped open the panel containing the locking device and set about jamming it.

"There, that's that," he sighed after a few seconds of poking about. "No way anything will get in now. I'm safe."

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+INFORMATION+ Zen intoned on the flight deck a few seconds after Vila's alteration to his locking panel. +LOCKING MECHANISM ON CABIN OCCUPIED BY VILA RESTAL HAS MALFUNCTIONED. REPAIRS WILL REQUIRE ONE HOUR AND FIFTEEN MINUTES.+

"Damn, I might have known he'd do that," Avon muttered to himself.

"But you didn't, did you, Avon?" Tarrant responded.

"Not now, Tarrant," Cally ordered, stepping between the two men. "You can kill each other after we've helped Vila."

"Don't you mean if, Cally?" Dayna put in.

Such questions are pointless in view of what I have just learned, ORAC spoke up.

"Well?" Avon demanded.

It is my belief that the person in question is suffering from extreme stress.

"Caused by?" Avon asked.

Unknown, but certainly the mounting pressures present aboard this ship might well have contributed to it.

"What do we suggest we do about them?" Tarrant inquired.

The answer is quite simple. Locate a planet of suitable safety and leave him there.

"No," Cally protested. "We will not discard Vila."

"No, Cally," Avon agreed. "We will not. There is another reason for Vila's condition, ORAC. Find it and do it quickly."

He switched on the intercom. "Vila, can you hear me?"

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An angry growl came from the intercom in the thief's rooms, garbled horrible noises which sent him scurrying back to the safety of his bed. "Go away," he cried.

"Vila, it's Avon. Listen to my voice, Vila. Listen!"

The growl became more intense, terrifying the thief more. He whimpered, pulling the coverlet up around himself for protection. "Please," he pleaded. "Please go away."

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"It's no use, Avon," Tarrant spoke up. "He doesn't recognize you."

"Maybe you should try, Tarrant," Cally suggested. "And you, too, Dayna?"

Avon opened his mouth to veto her suggestion, but didn't follow through. Something had to be done to free the thief from his predicament.

"Vila, it's Tarrant. Can you hear me?"

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A voice spoke from the intercom, a young voice, almost childlike. "Vila, it's Tarrant. Can you hear me?" it said.

"Tarrant? You'd better look out. There's monsters loose on board. They might come after you, too."

"Vila, there are no monsters," Dayna's voice came through the intercom now. She sounded juvenile, too.

"Are so monsters," Vila argued back. "Two of them were in my room, uh, cabin just a few minutes ago. Horrible things."

"Vila, Avon and Cally were just in your cabin. They were your monsters!" Tarrant went on.

"Avon and Cally? No, they...monsters were here."

"Vila, this is Avon. What do you hear?"

"You see," Vila exclaimed. "One of the monsters is listening in. I can hear him growling."

"That was Avon, Vila," Tarrant explained. "He asked you a question. You answered it for him."

"It really was Avon?" Vila asked after a few seconds.

"Yes, Vila, it really was."

"What's going on? Why did I see....Oh, no. No, stay back, please stay back." The thief's scream sent everyone running from the flight deck toward his cabin.

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The door had been most effectively jammed by the thief. Even Zen's auto repair circuits were having trouble ascertaining the problem and remedying it. From within, Vila's screams were increasing.

"What the hell is in there?" Tarrant exclaimed.

"We don't know," Avon replied, his eyes darkening at the thief's cries.

"Whatever it is, we've got to destroy it before it kills Vila," Dayna stated.

"If it can be destroyed," Cally amended. "Avon the essence is..." The cries from within ceased abruptly, cutting her off.

"Call him, Tarrant," Avon ordered.

"Vila? Vila, it's Tarrant again. Can you hear me?"

+AUTO REPAIR CIRCUITS HAVE NOW REPAIRED LOCKING MECHANISM+ Zen announced, startling everyone. The door slid open.

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For an instant, all they could do was stare in horror at the carnage in the room. There was blood everywhere and yet no body. Where was Vila? What had happened to him? The door to the bathroom moved slightly, then a bit more until it was wide enough to allow a battered and slashed Vila Restal to slip through and fall to the floor.

Cally started forward immediately, but was stopped by Avon's quick grasp at her arm.

Something else was exiting the bathroom. A gleaming white shape which slithered across the thief's body towards them. There was no distinct outline or form to the

creature. Rather, it appeared like an immense amoeba, its nucleus pulsing a bright red as it moved towards them.

More food it sang aloud. ***More...*** It stopped. ***Food and yet not food.*** It turned itself slightly, looking as if it were studying first Vila, then the others. ***that one, food. Not much, though. Need more.***

"What is it talking about?" Dayna asked with a shudder. The creature immediately took a step towards her, then stopped again.

Food? It sounded almost pathetic in its query.

"Cally, can you communicate with it?"

"No, I've been trying since it first began speaking."

"What do we do, Avon?" Tarrant whispered.

Avon didn't have a clue, but one thing was for certain. They had to get Vila out of the cabin. "Cally, try to contact Vila."

To see if he is alive, Cally knew as she nodded. *Vila, can you hear me? Vila, it's Cally.*

The thief did not respond, but lay perfectly still. The creature, however, did. It slid back until it again covered the thief's body. A predator protecting its kill.

Stop, it snarled. ***My food, not yours.***

"It can receive your thoughts, it seems, Cally," Avon spoke up.

Leave our friend alone, Cally snapped.

Not friend, the creature returned with an equal mental fierceness. ***My food.***

He is not food, Cally persisted. *He is our friend. He is a human being. You are hurting him.*

The creature pulsed a little, sending a little aura of light over the thief's body. ***Food not hurt. Go away. Mine!***

"Damn it, Avon," Tarrant exclaimed. "We've got to do something."

"No one is stopping you, Tarrant," Avon replied. "If you have a suggestion, let's hear it."

"Please, no more!" Vila's anguished cry put an end to the argument and brought everyone's attention back to him. The creature had engulfed him again and tiny flashes of light struck the thief time and again, each one opening a new wound on his body.

"At least we know he's alive," Dayna murmured.

"So it would seem," Avon agreed. "But he won't be for long at the rate that thing is hacking at him."

"Avon, what about if one of us distracts it, while the rest grab Vila?"

Avon stared at Tarrant as if he were a total imbecile. "Are you that fond of suicide, Tarrant?"

"Of course not," the young man protested. "But it's a chance." He gestured to the thief, whose cries were growing weaker. "He hasn't much time left."

Indeed, Vila looked as if he were being physically diminished with each passing moment. His moans were barely audible.

Good food, the creature exclaimed in delight, slicing at the thief again and drawing a feeble groan.

Stop that, Cally demanded.

Go away. Find own food.

"Avon, it is a chance!" Tarrant insisted.

"A chance at getting yourself or one of us killed. No, Tarrant, I think not. Dayna, fetch ORAC. I need his assistance on this." Dayna sped off. "Cally, continue harassing the beast. Whatever you do, don't let him concentrate fully on Vila or it will finish him."

"Ah, good," he smiled as Dayna came hurrying up the corridor. "What kept you?"

"Avon!" Dayna all but dumped ORAC into Avon's arms.

"Gently, Dayna. Damage him and we're all finished." He activated the computer. "ORAC, I've something for you to study."

Study? What are you... From the flickering of its lights, the computer had evidently detected the creature. **My word,** ORAC exclaimed. **Fascinating. Simply fascinating.**

"Avon, something's happening," Cally advised. "The creature is leaving Vila."

Indeed it was, but it was headed directly for them! ***Food?*** it called. ***Food?***

What? ORAC sputtered. **Most assuredly not.**

The being paused on the threshold, the nucleus swirling in a myriad of reds. ***Not food?***

Of course not, ORAC snapped back.

The creature gave an audible sigh and started back for Vila.

"ORAC, do something!" Tarrant exclaimed. "Keep it away from Vila!"

How exactly am I to do that? the computer demanded.

"What is it?" Avon snapped.

I...am not sure at this time. Further study...

"Time is of the essence," Avon advised coldly. "I want to know what it is and how to destroy it, ORAC. Now!"

I cannot comply with such a demand, ORAC retorted in an equally cold voice.

"You'll do it, ORAC," Dayna threatened, "Or we'll tell that little monster that you are 'food'."

ORAC sputtered and gasped at that but set about securing the information it needed.

Meanwhile, the beast had returned to its 'food'. This time, there were no protests of any kind from Vila. The thief was either dying or very close to it.

"Come on, ORAC," Avon muttered. "Come on."

Very well, the computer announced. **The creature which is currently occupying Vila Restal's cabin is a form of parasitic life.**

"Tell us something we didn't already know," Dayna mumbled. "How do we kill it?"

My suggestion would be to use the vacuum of space. Seal the room and evacuate the air from it.

"Vila is in there, too," Cally protested.

Vila Restal's life signs are nearly extinguished, ORAC replied matter-of-factly. **Once the creature has finished him, it will proceed to another of your party.** The computer's lights flickered for a moment. **Most interesting. The creature feeds on pain and fear, converting the emotions into actual protoplasm. This creates a new field of exploration to be dealt with.**

"How do we kill it, ORAC?" Avon cracked.

I have already told you, the computer exclaimed.

"I think you had an excellent idea, Dayna," Avon went on. "Here, creature, here's more 'food'." He shoved ORAC quickly into the room.

Food! the beat cried happily and slid over and around ORAC.

Here now, I'm not food, the computer snapped and sent a violent electrical shock through the creature's membrane. That did nothing but excite it, however.

Good food, it told Avon. ***Take old thing. Not good. All gone now.***

"Do we trust it?" Tarrant asked Avon.

"We don't have a choice, do we?" came the reply. Tarrant hurried into the room and pulled the thief over his shoulders and ran back out.

"The medical unit, Tarrant, quickly," Cally ordered.

Avon, meanwhile, sealed the cabin. "Zen, evacuate the air from Vila's cabin immediately.

+CONFIRMED.+

For a few brief moments, there was nothing, then a terrible keening began which nearly shattered Avon and Dayna's eardrums. The sound continued for several minutes, then gradually faded away.

"Do you think it's gone?" Dayna asked Avon.

+THE ONE CALLED ORAC WISHES TO ADVISE THAT HE IS GREATLY IRRITATED THAT YOU HAVE INTERRUPTED HIS STUDY OF THE PARASITE,+ Zen suddenly informed them.

"I'd say that means it's gone," Avon chuckled. "Pressurize the cabin, Zen."

+CONFIRMED.+

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Vila was attached to every piece of life support the medical unit had when Avon and Dayna arrived. Cally and Tarrant were each engaged in trying to seal the countless bleeding holes in the thief's skin.

"How is he?"

"The wounds are not as severe as they appear," Cally advised, sealing yet another one. "The creature inflicted them to frighten and create pain, not serious injury."

"But he's lost a lot of blood," Tarrant went on. "Maybe too much, according to the med computer. It's trying to synthesise some now. Seems he's got a rare type."

+SYNTHESIS HAS COMMENCED,+ the med computer chose that moment to announce.

"How long before total collection is obtained?" Cally asked.

+TWENTY-THREE POINT FOUR MINUTES.+

"What about the creature?" Tarrant asked, yielding his place to Dayna.

"Dead, I assume, since ORAC was most displeased with my removing his prize specimen before he was finished with it."

"I don't understand, Avon, where did it come from? Why did it choose Vila?"

"I don't know, Tarrant, but I intend to find out. Cally, I'll be on the flight deck, questioning ORAC."

If it is his time, Avon, Vila will not be alone.

Avon held her eyes for a moment. *Was Vila really that close to death?* his gaze asked.

He is very weak, Avon. Very weak. I don't know if he can hold on long enough for the blood to strengthen him.

Avon dropped his gaze to the thief. Weak was an understatement. A piece of paper held more life than Vila appeared to. "The life support will keep him alive, Cally. The rest is up to Vila."

She nodded, knowing that his words were true. If the thief wished to life, he would not yield to Death. But at the same time, she sensed an overpowering weariness coming from Vila. He was tired of fighting, tired of running. Perhaps tired of living as well. The Auron shook her head slightly. No, such thoughts were nonsense. Or at least she hoped they were.

"Cally, if there's nothing more?" Tarrant asked.

"No," she said quietly. "Dayna can help me finish up. Thank you."

"Then I'll join Avon. I want to find out where that creature came from, too."

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"That's got them all, Cally," Dayna advised. "What a mess. Once that synthetic flesh starts growing, he'll be scratching everywhere." Dayna smiled mischievously. "That should be fun."

Cally managed a wan smile in return. "He won't think so."

Dayna reached over and squeezed her hand. "Don't worry, Cally. Vila's a survivor. Avon told me that. He'd have to be to survive the Delta Dome. My father told me about them and the horrible things that went on in there." Dayna shivered. "Made the Saurons look civilized by comparison."

"Vila has never spoken much about his life there, but I have sensed his pain at times. There are things he will not share with anyone."

"Avon's like that, too," Dayna stated.

"I know. He keeps too much inside."

"I wish Vila would do that. His complaining drives me crazy sometimes."

"Only sometimes?" Cally teased. "I wonder how Vila would react if Avon began complaining as he does?"

Dayna rolled her eyes at the thought of it. "It'd be hell to pay and back for anyone who heard them."

"But it might be worth it," Cally chuckled.

"It might at that," Dayna agreed with a grin. "It might at that."

* * * * * * *

ORAC was none-the-worse for wear after his experiences with the alien life form, though he was in very bad humour when Avon removed him from Vila's cabin. There was no sign of the alien. It had been destroyed exactly as ORAC had said it would be.

I find it extremely distasteful that you should have placed my person in such a hazardous situation, ORAC snapped at Avon.

"It can't have been any worse than what that creature thought when it tried to devour you," Tarrant laughed.

Devour is not what it intended to do, ORAC sputtered. **Rather, it sought to frighten me. Hah, the very thought of such a thing.**

"Were you frightened, ORAC?" Avon asked, curious.

Of course not.

"Then why did you object so strongly to my placing you inside the cabin?"

I had no idea of your intentions at the time.

"Meaning you were worried and perhaps a little scared when he did it," Tarrant furnished.

Fear and worry are terms which have no possible basis for existence with myself. Now kindly leave me alone.

"Not quite yet, ORAC," Avon smiled. "We need to know what that thing was and if there are others yet about."

Others? For a computer incapable of fear, ORAC had a touch of hysteria in his voice. **Oh, others,** he repeated a few seconds later, sounding more secure. **I do not believe that possible. The parasite was bisexual in nature. No others were needed to propagate its species.**

"Its origin, ORAC," Tarrant pressed.

No doubt the planet Keezarn, the computer went on.

"If that were true," Avon replied, "why weren't the rest of us infected as well? We were all down there."

As to that, I have no immediate answer. That should require further study of the parasite, which is no longer possible. ORAC still sounded upset about that.

"What about the ship Vila found, Avon?" Tarrant offered. "The one with the transmat mechanism?"

"A possibility, though for the parasite to have survived there, it would have required a source of 'food'. Vila said the only beings on the ship were long dead."

Unless it was capable of hibernation over long periods of time, ORAC interjected.

"Extremely long periods of time, ORAC," Avon remarked. "There is always the planet Vila found."

"For their sake and Vila's, I hope not." Tarrant shuddered.

Avon did too, mentally. "Let us proceed on the principle that the parasite came from the ship. And that it had some type of hibernation. Why didn't it infect the woman with Vila?"

I can only theorize, ORAC advised.

"Then do so," Avon ordered.

Vila Restal is a human of unstable emotions. It is entirely possible that the parasite sensed this.

"Very probably," Tarrant agreed. "Vila was no doubt extremely nervous when he found himself on a ship a million or so light years away."

Avon nodded. "And having identified its target, it broke its hibernation and invaded him?"

Yes, and began its growth toward adulthood, its development causing the behavioral changes in its host.

"I don't believe it," Tarrant said, shaking his head. "How could something that small affect a person's mind?"

"A virus is small, Tarrant, and look what it can do," Avon pointed out. "And if I'm not mistaken, there have been documented cases where chemical discharges from certain insects have created temporary euphoria in their victims."

Tarrant stared at him in surprise, then thought about it a few minutes before saying anything. "But Vila was not euphoric, he was hallucinating."

"As the creature wanted him to," Avon reminded Tarrant. "It needed his fear and pain to feed upon. Different needs bred by different creatures."

"Well, it got more than enough of that from him," Tarrant replied grimly.

"Yes, it did." Avon punched up the medical unit. It had been an hour since he and Tarrant had left there.

"Dayna."

"Where is Cally?"

"She's busy right now, Avon. Is it important?"

"Has Vila come round yet?"

"No, but he looks better than he did. The med computer says it's still too early to tell, though."

"When Cally is finished, have her call me."

"Right."

* * * * * * *

Cally was very busy indeed , using every ounce of her telepathic ability to try to counter the horrible effects the creature had had on Vila. Since they had finished the treatment of his physical injuries, the Auron had been sending reassurances of safety to Vila. For a while it had seemed he had not heard them, but now Cally felt certain he had. Vila had merely been too frightened to acknowledge them.

"Cally, you have to rest or you'll collapse yourself," Dayna scolded. "Here, drink this."

Cally took a taste, and recognized it immediately. A vitamin mixture which she had prepared herself on several occasions when the others had needed a boost in energy. She downed it and handed the empty glass back. "Thank you, Dayna."

"Do you think he heard you?"

"I think so. His color is much better and there is less tension in his body. Yes, Dayna, I think he heard me."

Dayna smiled at the relief in Cally's voice. "Avon called. He's worried about him, too, though he didn't exactly say that."

Cally smiled. "I think it would kill both of them if they admitted how much they liked each other."

"Me too." Dayna yawned.

"You are tired, Dayna. Why don't you get some sleep?"

"You need it more than I do," Dayna quickly protested. "You should see the rings around your eyes."

"Telepathy is not an easy thing for me, Dayna," Cally sighed. "Zelda has always been far stronger than I."

"Is she really your exact twin?"

Cally nodded.

"Dayna, is Cally <u>still</u> busy?" There was a slight note of irritation in Avon's voice.

Cally and Dayna looked at each other and suddenly giggled.

"What is it, Avon?" Cally answered, smothering her mirth.

"I wondered if the med computer had found anything in Vila's blood samples. ORAC believes the hallucinations were caused by chemical discharges into his system."

+THERE ARE FAINT TRACES OF SUCH IN THE SUBJECT'S BLOOD+ the med computer confirmed upon questioning.

"How's Vila, Cally?" It was Tarrant.

"Improving, Tarrant," the Auron advised.

"That's good," Tarrant replied, sounding very glad indeed.

Perhaps he still blamed himself for what had almost happened on Keezarn, Cally thought to herself. "Anything else, Avon?"

"No," came the reply, then the click of the intercom being closed down.

"Just once," Dayna ventured, "just once I'd like to see him act worried about someone."

"And have him appear human to us?" Cally chuckled. "No, that would never do." She closed her eyes for a moment, trying to relax and let the vitamin mixture do its work. But it didn't seem to help. She still felt very tired. The Auron swayed slightly.

"That does it, Cally. Off you go to your cabin this instant!" Dayna ordered.

Cally started to protest, then stopped. "You know, you do a very good imitation of Avon."

Dayna grinned at her. "Thank you very much. Now go!"

"Yes, Avon," Cally laughed back. "If Vila comes around..."

"I'll let you know."

* * * * * * *

The monsters were all gone, the woman's voice had reassured him countless times. It was safe for him now. Everyone was all right and he would be too. But Vila was afraid to come out of his hiding place. It had always sheltered him before, kept him safe from the Federation torturers who had tormented his poor body with their devices and narcotics. How did he know he wasn't back in their clutches? How did he know that being with Blake and Avon had even happened at all? Maybe somehow they had broken through his non-conditioning and had been playing with his mind.

There had been one occasion when they had nearly succeeded in doing just that. He had been nine at the time, caught pinching an Alpha's identification pass. They had taken him to a special building in the Delta Dome, one from which few Deltas ever returned. The horrors they had inflicted on him still haunted his dreams sometimes.

On the verge of breaking both Vila's mind and body, the psycho-therapists suddenly came up against a wall as solid as anything physically built. They had battered at it with electronics and sound, doused it with chemicals and narcotics, tried everything they could come up with, including several experimental techniques, and failed.

But they did not admit defeat easily. Unable to condition him, they did the next best thing, they sentenced him to three years treatment in the Andros Clinic for the Criminally Insane. The wall served to protect his mind but not his body as the youngster was beaten and attacked by both personnel and his fellow prisoners. By the time his term was up, there was nothing left of his innocence and very little left of his spirit. He crept and scurried about after his release, ducking if anyone so much as lifted a hand. He heard and saw everything. That had saved Vila's life on more than one occasion in the Sanitarium and he used it well on the outside. Or rather, had used it until Blake had appeared on the scene.

Was Blake a real person? he wondered. Was Avon one too? Not that Avon ever pretended to be a human being. The thief laughed. Avon was almost as great a pretender as Vila was. Pretending to be so hard and unyielding. While I am the timid, easily terrified coward. Well, it beat charging headlong into battle like Tarrant and Dayna always seemed anxious to do. Youthful idiots, the pair of them.

And Cally? Well now, she was different. A very nice, very lovely lady for all she was an alien. She certainly didn't look all that different from the other human women he had encountered, and he had encountered quite a few in his time. Vila smiled to himself. Quite a few. No, Cally was a special to him as...as Kerril had been. That is, if Kerril had been real at all. Once again he grew afraid. Was this all just some illusion of the Federation's? Was his safe haven an illusion also? Was he an illusion? Vila didn't know, just hugged himself tighter. He hoped it wasn't all some dream. He had never felt as safe as he had with Blake, for all he had complained constantly of the risks Blake was taking. Blake would never leave any of his people behind. Look how he had gone back to rescue Cally. Vila knew that Blake would have done the very same thing had it been the thief or Avon or any of them. Blake cared for all of them. Or rather, had cared for them.

And yet, if that were true, why hadn't he tried to contact any of them? It had been almost a year since Star One. Where was Blake? Vila wondered. Was he dead? Or a prisoner of the Federation? No, Servalan would have announced that and used him as bait to get **Liberator**. Maybe the Andromedans had gotten him. Vila shivered. He hoped not. They didn't seem like nice aliens at all, after what Avon had said they did to those technicians on Star One. But if Blake wasn't a prisoner and he wasn't dead, where was he?

Vila sighed deeply. It was all very well to be safe here in his haven but it was also very lonely, especially since Cally had left. That it had been her voice reassuring him, he had known but chosen to ignore, still too frightened to respond to her. *I wonder what she is doing now. Maybe if I do just a quick reconnoiter and then hurry back here. it will be all right.* A small part of him shook with fear but he shushed it, promising everything would be all right. He was only just going outside for a second and would be right back.

The thief opened to door a crack and peered out. There were no more monsters that he

could see, only the pulsing grey mist which he recognized as his mind. Nothing moved in it, no flashes of anything harmful. No, it seemed he was alone. He took a step outside, looked about and heard voices talking in the distance.

* * * * * *

"Avon, you needn't have come," Cally murmured. "He's in normal sleep now according to the med computer."

"Normal sleep but not awake, Cally," Avon countered. "A brain damaged idiot can have normal sleep."

"Vila suffered no such damage," the Auron reassured him, suddenly realizing what Avon was afraid to say. "The chemical traces were all but gone when the med computer first checked him."

"Having been bled out of him, no doubt," Avon growled.

Cally nodded. "His blood count is up now. Everything is beginning to return to normal."

"Except he's not regained consciousness, damn it." Avon didn't need to shout to make his concern known.

Avon, Vila is a survivor. He survived the Federation's toys, he will survive this.

Avon blinked at her silent words. "Let us hope so." He paused, studying her a moment. "You've been using your telepathy on him?"

"Yes. I think it helped him when he needed it most. How did you know?"

Avon smiled faintly. "It drains you quite a bit, using it on humans. I can tell by your eyes."

"Dark, horrible rings, Dayna said. Are they still there?"

"Barely, but still visible if one looks closely enough."

"As you are looking now, Avon?"

He caught himself walking towards her and stopped. "I'll send Tarrant to relieve you," Avon advised and left.

Cally smiled. *Too bad, Dayna,* she thought to herself, *you just missed your chance to see him as he really is.*

* * * * * * *

Vila paused, listening to the voices. It could not be, but it was. Avon sounded very worried about him. Very worried. And he was clearly indicating it to Cally. She might be an alien, but she had been around humans long enough to recognize such an emotion.

Avon never had revealed any part of himself to anyone but Vil, and then it had been but a very brief flash. That time when they had robbed Freedom City. What fun that had been! At least up until Vila had been drugged and then duped into playing chess. It was very good luck that Avon had been with him or else he would have been one very dead thief. When they had planned the escapade and then when they'd hurriedly teleported back aboard, both he and Avon had been closer than ever before. Fellow thieves as it were. Vila grinned to himself.

He heard Cally say something which clearly made Avon pause before he answered. Then his answer had been pure evasion.

Trying to proposition him, are you, Cally? the thief wondered. No, not Cally. She wouldn't have to do that to any of the men aboard. A friendly gesture and any one of the men would be happy to hop in her bed. At least Vila would knew he would be. Except for one thing. Cally obviously preferred that someone to be Avon.

Vila sighed again. Such a waste and Vila was sure he could show Cally a few tricks and she could do likewise for him. Oh well.

Vila, it is safe now. The monsters are all gone.

I know that, Cally, the thief thought. He turned about and looked at his haven of safety. It was battered and dark with stains, but it still held strong. The little piece of himself he'd left inside pleaded for him to come back.

No, he told it. *Time to get on with living again. Hopefully not dying. Tarrant won't even get me to do his bidding again,* Vila swore. Then again, that affair hadn't been totally wasted. He had met Kerril and discovered a new world and helped a whole civilization survive. And he had single-handedly eliminated the Federation's No. 2 criminal--Bayban the Butcher. Surely that meant something to someone somewhere. All he had to do was find the right someone to tell it to.

Vila, you are safe. It is all right now. You may come home now.

I'm coming, Cally, he called out to the grey mist. *I'm coming.*

* * * * * * *

Vila Restal opened his eyes and managed a lop-sided smile at Cally. Had he really been that far gone, he wondered. He felt very weak and when he tried to talk, the result was simply horrid.

"Slowly, Vila," Cally soothed, holding a glass of something pink to his lips. He

sipped it and made a face. "I know, you hate vitamin mixtures, but your body needs this. Drink it all." She spoke quite sternly and he obeyed.

"Ugh," he managed to get out after the liquid had cleared his throat. "Could have put some soma in it or something to deaden the taste."

"Don't be silly." She stepped to the intercom. "Vila is awake, Avon."

"So are the rest of us," Avon answered after a moment. "Tell me something I am not aware of."

"Avon!" Dayna said in the background in an exasperated tone. "Vila, welcome back."

The thief smiled at Cally, who smiled right back. He had been right about her. Alien she might be but she could read Avon almost as well as he could.

"He says thanks, Dayna," Cally relayed for the thief, whose throat still was resisting any loud speech.

"Take it easy for a while," Tarrant advised. "Get your strength back."

The look Vila gave Cally was a questioning one. *He was worried about you, too, Vila.* To Tarrant, she answered, "He intends on it."

"I'll bet he is," Tarrant laughed.

"I suppose he expects to hear something similar from me," Avon announced.

"Avon, he has been through a great deal," Cally replied.

"Haven't we all?" Avon retorted. The intercom clicked off.

Vila wanted to laugh, but his throat would not permit it. In fact, the giggle he settled for nearly choked him to death.

"Rest is what you need, Vila," Cally advised, serving him another cup of the pink stuff. "That and plenty of fluids."

"But no soma?" he whispered with pleading eyes.

"No soma."

He knew he would have to be content with that, especially since she was reaching for another glass of that vitamin mixture. He managed to down it, then was told to go back to sleep. "Bully," he muttered half-heartedly, then closed his eyes.

* * * * * *

Avon stopped by on his way to his cabin, appearing tired but relieved at the thief's recovery. Or at least that was what Cally thought.

"A few days rest, Avon," the Auron advised quietly, "and he'll be back to normal."

"Vila has never been normal for all the time I've known him, Cally," Avon said quietly, but there was a hint of a smile about his lips.

"Must you always pick on him?" Cally inquired.

Avon's smile vanished. "I do not 'pick on him'."

"Do so," mumbled a voice from the general direction of one Vila Restal.

Cally nearly burst into laughter at the quickly concealed look of surprised on Avon's face.

"And how long have you been awake?" Avon demanded.

"Not long," Vila replied hastily. "Avon, what was that thing, anyway?"

"A parasite you picked up somewhere."

"A what?"

"Avon, maybe you should wait before telling him," Cally said.

"He asked for an explanation, Cally," Avon pointed out.

"And I want one," Vila seconded.

"Very well," the Auron conceded. "I'll be in my cabin."

"She always seems to know when a person wants to be alone," Vila stated.

"Yes, she does," Avon agreed. "Now, as far as ORAC can ascertain..."

An hour later, a frightened, angry and very confused Vila Restal lay staring at Avon in utter shock.

"So you're saying this...this bug liked my looks and jumped in me?"

"Crudely put, but yes, Vila, that's exactly what I'm saying."

Vila shivered. "How horrible."

"Yes, I imagine it was." And since Avon felt like teasing the thief, he added something more. "With one type of parasite finding you so attractive, it's entirely possible that others might as well."

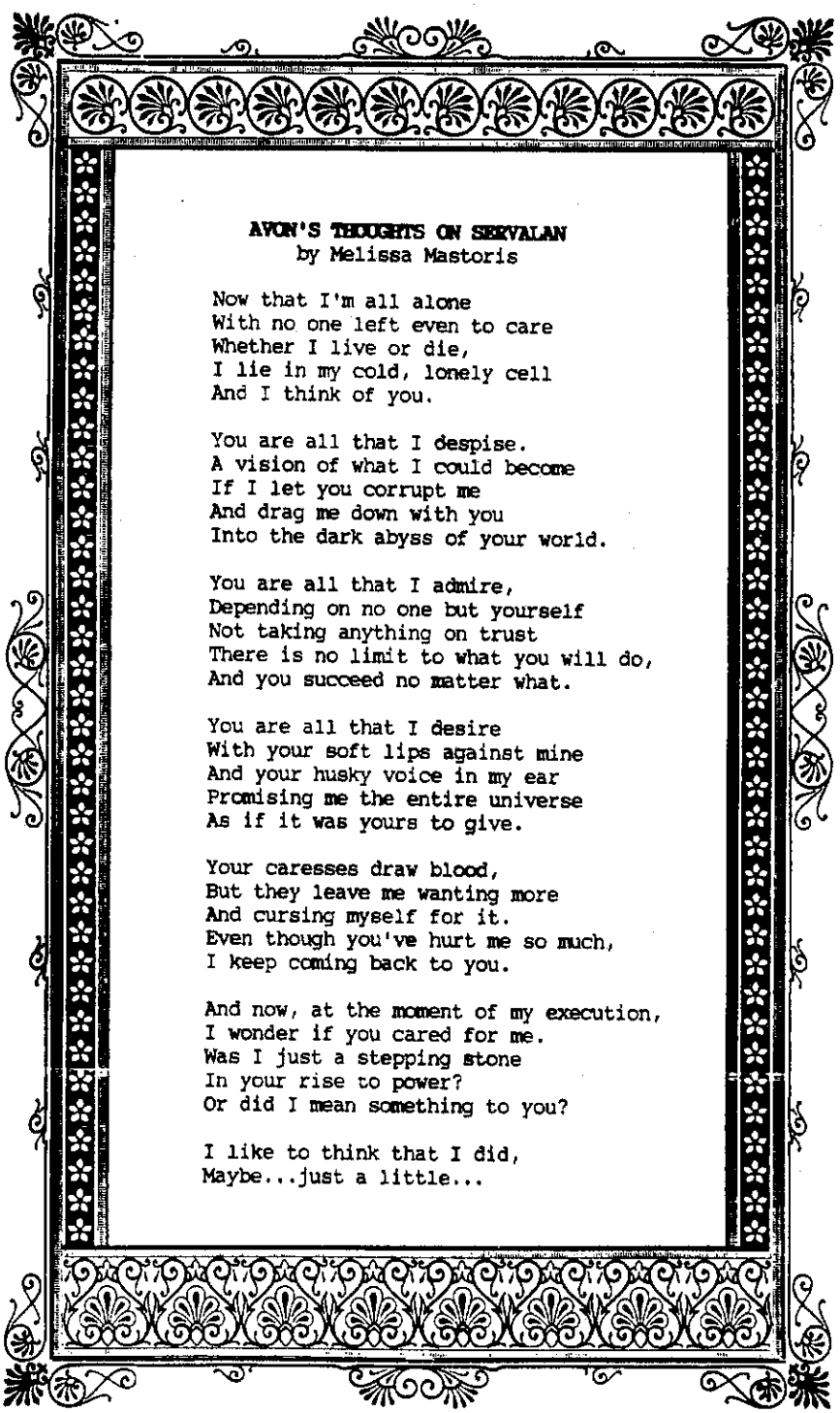
"You didn't have to tell me that, Avon," Vila exclaimed. "I'm not going downworld for anything any more."

"What a pity," Avon replied with a faint twinkle in his eye. "Tarrant and I had some business to transact in Space City. I had hoped you might want to accompany us."

"Space City, why that's..." Vila stared at him a moment, then smiled. "Maybe I'll postpone my quarantine until after Space City."

"I wouldn't want to force you into anything," Avon advised with a straight face.

"Oh, you're not, Avon." The thief flexed his fingers in anticipation. "You're not."



AVON'S THOUGHTS ON SERVALAN
by Melissa Mastoris

Now that I'm all alone
With no one left even to care
Whether I live or die,
I lie in my cold, lonely cell
And I think of you.

You are all that I despise.
A vision of what I could become
If I let you corrupt me
And drag me down with you
Into the dark abyss of your world.

You are all that I admire,
Depending on no one but yourself
Not taking anything on trust
There is no limit to what you will do,
And you succeed no matter what.

You are all that I desire
With your soft lips against mine
And your husky voice in my ear
Promising me the entire universe
As if it was yours to give.

Your caresses draw blood,
But they leave me wanting more
And cursing myself for it.
Even though you've hurt me so much,
I keep coming back to you.

And now, at the moment of my execution,
I wonder if you cared for me.
Was I just a stepping stone
In your rise to power?
Or did I mean something to you?

I like to think that I did,
Maybe...just a little...

BUST THE DEAD

by Kim Wigmore

art by Christopher Cook

Dr. Peter Venkman proudly held up the smoking trap, displaying it to the crowd that had gathered around himself and his co-workers. "It's all right, folks, we bagged your ghost for you. You can tell the museum manager it's safe to come out."

"Oh thank you," said the flustered little man, dabbing at his forehead with a handkerchief. "Whatever can we do to repay you for ridding our beloved museum of this horrible menace?"

"Well, you can start by paying our fee," said Peter. "Let me see...I'd say that five thousand dollars should about cover it." He smiled in an ingratiating manner.

"Oh my," said the manager, clearly not expecting an amount quite so high. "That's a bit steep...but if you follow me to my office, I'll make arrangements for the payment. Come along."

Peter fell into step behind the balding little man, followed by Dr. Egon Spengler, Dr. Ray Stantz, and Winston Zeddemore. The three looked at him dubiously--Peter always seemed to enjoy pressing his luck. The figure he had come up with was rather high for catching a simple Type 4 Vaporous Apparition, especially since they had destroyed a delicate Ming vase, three brontosaurus skeletons, and a model of the 'Friendship 7' in the attempt. They had chased it through the entire museum before it was finally caught, and Egon was relieved that they had not broken anything else...like the rest of the exhibits. "Peter," he whispered. "Maybe we should lower the fee, considering what we did to the 'Culture and Cuisine' display..."

"Aw come on Egon," he broke in. "This is what being a Ghostbuster is all about. Fun, excitement...you know, the whole ball o' wax."

The parapsychologist's report was interrupted. "Well would you look at that," said Winston, catching sight of one of the displays on the way to the manager's office. The others stopped and gathered around the glass case he had indicated.

"What the heck is that?" asked Ray.

"The weirdest thing I've ever seen, that's for sure," said Winston.

"It is rather odd," agreed the manager. "But quite fascinating, wouldn't you say?"

"Fascinating isn't the word I'd pick," said Peter. He leaned forward to get a better look at the strange object in the case. It appeared to be some form of musical instrument, but like nothing he'd ever heard of. He wasn't even sure he could have imagined something like this. It was definitely something to do with music, but it most resembled an image from a painting by Hieronymous Bosch. It had not one neck but two, each with its own set of strings; and it also had the mouthpiece of some sort of reed instrument. The wood was inlaid with bits of stone, ivory, and glass; and it was held by an elaborately decorated leather strap. In short, Peter thought it looked straight out of a nightmare...and said so. "What is it, the earliest known example of a one-man band?"

"How much do you know about it? Could anyone actually play it?" asked Ray, ever-curious as usual.

"This is a new acquisition, and the information hasn't yet arrived from London. I myself know that it dates from some time in the Middle Ages; and, according to legend, there was only one man who could play it with any degree of skill--the man who made it. I'm looking forward to finding out more, but for the moment that's all I know."

"Maybe if he'd cut a few records, we'd still be talking about him," joked the dark-haired man. "Classical's pretty popular these days, and I'm a bit of a musician myself--"

"There's something else we know about it," said Egon slowly.

"Oh really? What's that, Egon?" asked Ray.

"That it's a highly concentrated source of psychokinetic energy," he answered, holding up his flashing PKE meter.

* * * * * * *

"Real smart of you to convince the manager to let us borrow the funky banjo, Egon. I had no idea that it might cause 'a dangerous supernatural occurrence of an unknown and possibly destructive nature," said Peter, lounging back in a chair at the large table at their headquarters. "I didn't think you had it in you to make up neat stuff like that."

Egon tilted his head down and looked at the other man over the lenses of his glasses. "It's all in the name of science, Peter. I think the instrument warrants further study--it's an amazing discovery."

"What's an amazing discovery?" asked Janine, their secretary. She had just walked

in, her arms laden with groceries. Slimer, their unofficial 'pet ghost', floated behind her, peering intently at the food. "Slimer, get away. You can have something after we unpack. So Egon, what's your discovery?" she asked as she dumped the armload onto the table.

"This intriguing and highly valuable artifact," said Egon, brushing away a few stray tomatoes that were rolling in its direction. "It has a PKE reading of astronomical proportions."

Janine was unimpressed. "It looks like something I saw in a Twilight Zone episode," she said, her high-pitched Brooklyn accent becoming even more nasal with her annoyance at Egon's interest in the object (and not in her, especially in the sexy new outfit she'd bought just to come to work in). "Where'd you find that thing, in a crackerjack box?"

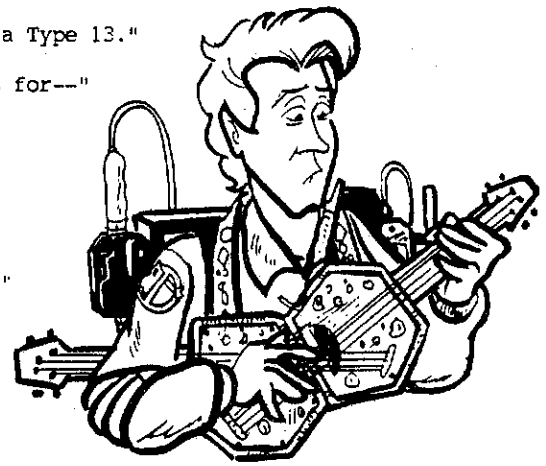
"No, at the Danvers Museum," said Egon, missing her sarcasm completely. "I've never gotten readings like this from anything. Look at this."

"Egon, you know I don't understand even half of what you tell me about these gadgets. Explain it--in English." She sat down next to him and smoothed the creases from her miniskirt.

"If this were a ghost, it would register as a Type 13."

Winston gulped. "Do they come that high?"

"Not that I know of," replied Egon. "Except for--"



"Oh please don't bring that up again," sighed Ray. "If it doesn't pertain directly to this case, I don't think we should talk about it. Besides, how was I to know she was dead?" he asked plaintively.

"Have you checked the Spirit Guide?" asked Winston, trying to change the subject. "Is the instrument or anything like it in there?"

"No...but it should be," said Egon. "Anything with that much psychic energy tied up in it must have had an interesting history."

"Interesting," repeated Peter, taking the instrument from his co-worker. "Hey Slimer, you like music?" The green apparition nodded enthusiastically and clapped its hands. "Then why don't you go wait in line for Springsteen tickets? I'm sure they'll go on sale sometime in the next few months...and stop dripping on the table, Spud," he said threateningly.

"Aw Peter, you'll hurt his feelings," said Ray. Slimer made a sound of agreement.

"Sorry, Spud," said Peter absently, turning the double-necked instrument over in his hands. "Y'know, the guy who made this must have been on the same stuff as the guy who played it." He strummed it a few times experimentally.

"The manager said they were the same person--Peter, what did you just do?" asked Egon.

"Just this," he said innocently, running his fingers over the strings.

"Ray, Winston, come over here. Do it again, Peter," ordered the other man. Peter shrugged and complied. "Look at these readings," said Egon.

"They're off the scale," Ray said in amazement. Janine and Slimer moved behind him so that they could also watch.

"This is incredible...an enormous jump in psychokinetic tension..."

"It looked like an exponential increase, and no sign of a plateau..."

Peter wasn't sure of what he was hearing. "You mean to tell me that when I plucked a few strings on this thing, it made the instruments do that? So what would happen if I played something else?"

"No, Peter," warned Egon, seeing what the other man was about to do and unsure of the consequences if anything more than a few notes were played. Peter did not seem to hear him, for he was looking at the instrument as if it might suddenly come alive; then he brought his hand down again and played the first few lines of 'Karn Evil 9'.

The overhead lights began flashing on and off. The room began shaking--no, it was the desk that Peter had so quickly laid the instrument on after he realized what was happening and that the object in his hands was the cause of it. It was the instrument and the table that were shaking, and moving the rest of the room with them. "Oh Egon," wailed Janine, throwing her arms around him as everything finally went dark around them.

* * * * * * *

"Egon?"
"Yes Peter?"
"Did I do that?"
"Yes Peter."
"Egon?"
"Yes Peter?"
"What did I do?"
"You mean you haven't opened your eyes yet either?"

"No."

"Well, why don't you? It's quiet now."

"No it's not, Egon."

"Of course it's quiet, Peter--I can hear the birds singing and the wind rustling the leaves on the tree branches."

"Yeah Egon, that's what I'd like to talk to you about...the birds singing in our office and the wind rustling the leaves on the tree branches in our office."

"You noticed that too?"

"Yes, Egon."

"I think we'd really better open our eyes now..."

"Peter, you blew up the building!" yelled Janine, seeing that they were no longer inside the old firehouse; they were instead standing in a clearing in what appeared to be a forest. The sun was shining brightly, and the sky was clear and blue with just a few wispy clouds above them.

"I don't think so, Janine," said Egon, pulling out several instruments from his pack. "I think it more likely that we've been transported to another location."

"So what you're trying to say is that Peter blasted us someplace else," sighed Winston. "So how long a walk is it back to the office?"

"Maybe we can catch a cab," said Ray.

"Are you sure we're still even in New York? Look around--there's no smog, no bums, no people getting mugged, and the most wildlife we see in a day are pigeons and a few rats if we're lucky," said Peter, leaning against a tree. "Hey Egon, you look kinda worried."

"Guys...I don't think we're going to have much luck getting a cab."

Slimer whimpered. "I knew it," moaned Winston. "How far away are we?"

"Where are we, Egon..." asked Peter, knowing from the other man's ominous tone that he probably would not like the answer.

"Well, if these readings are correct--and I've already checked them, so don't bother to ask--we have experienced temporal displacement."

"That doesn't help me, Egon..." warned Peter.

"We're somewhere in the Middle Ages," said Egon, very quickly.

"What?!?" Peter sounded ever-so-slightly hysterical.

"The psychokinetic energy held in the instrument must have been powerful enough to shoot us back into the past."

"Well--well why didn't it take the one-man-band too?"

"I'm not sure...maybe it already exists in this time and it can't be duplicated?" suggested the light-haired scientist.

"Egon, this is not a Star Trek episode--this is real life and I want to go home! Are you sure we're in the past? Maybe we're just in some section of Central Park that people don't go to."

"Let me take some more readings, but I think you'll find that we are indeed somewhere in the Middle Ages. And besides what the instruments say, take a look at the plant and animal life. I've already noticed several species that are extinct in the Twentieth Century. We're definitely back in time, besides having transported in space...I'm fairly sure we're someplace in Europe."

"It's gonna be a real long walk home," said Winston despondently.

* * * * * * *

Several hours later, the time travellers were still in the clearing in the medieval forest, no closer to home than they had been when they had first appeared. But they hadn't been idle; Egon had been busily scribbling calculations on his notepad, Ray had been fiddling with all the equipment that had been transported with them, and Peter had gone through periods of restless pacing and attempts at relaxation. He was now lying under a tree watching the others.

"I think I've found a way to get us home," stated Egon, after a while.

Peter brightened immediately. "You have? That's great!"

"There may be a problem..."

The dark-haired man sighed and leaned back against his tree. "There's always a problem. Just tell us your idea."

"My calculations indicate that if we were to re-create the conditions of the original occurrence, we would be returned to our proper time and place. However, finding a protonic anomaly of Type 13 or higher is extremely unlikely."

Ray grinned. "Egon, I think I've got just what you're looking for...according to these readings, the psychokinetic energy tied to the instrument is duplicated here, in this time--and I don't mean just any old Type 13."

"Like there's such a thing as 'any old Type 13'," muttered Peter.

"No guys, you've got to see this--the PKE meter is registering the exact same kind of disturbance, about a mile in that direction," Ray pointed. "Do you think it's linked to whatever happened to us?"

Egon nodded. "It's not unheard of. Remember what happened when we went to New Orleans, and how time was turned back then?"

"You mean the instrument sent us back to wherever it picked up the energy?" interrupted Peter.

"Probably. We might be able to rechannel it to create another bridge in the space-time continuum, transporting us to the point at which we left."

"How did you figure that out, Egon? No, don't tell me--it's bound to be something weird and esoteric, like it always is. What we've got to do is now is get to that protonic anomaly, pronto."

"Find the instrument again, and play what you played before? That doesn't sound very scientific," said Ray disapprovingly. "Still, if it's our only hope..."

"It is," replied Peter. "Do you think it was coincidence that brought us here? So call it Fate, call it Kismet, call it Karma...we've got to get to that PK disturbance!"

"Guys..." said Janine, her eyes going very wide behind her glasses. "I think you should take a look at this..."

Out of the forest had just come several large, dangerous-looking, peasant-type men. What had bothered Janine were their large, dangerous-looking, peasant-type weapons. Especially since they were all pointed at the hapless time travellers.

"See! I told you they were 'ere!" shouted one. "Demons, they are--I seen 'em appear in a great flash o' light!"

"Fascinating," whispered Egon. "We appear to have been transported to medieval England."

"Look at their clothes...I ain't ever seen anything like that."

"Ooh, you're right," said another, gesturing with his knife. "Looks like they've got some sorta female demon with 'em..."

"And it ain't wearin' much..."

"Must be one o' them evil spirits that tempt men..."

"You mean a succubus?"

"No, it 'asn't got wings."

"P'raps it's an alu-demon..."

"Yeah..."

"Lucky we got that exorcist up in Sir Walter's manor, ain't it?"

"Yeah..."

"But he ain't here now..."

The peasants stopped talking and stared for a moment at them. Then they seemed to make up their minds.

"Kill them! Banish them to the fires o' hell!"

Egon took charge. "Plan B, everyone."

Ray looked around wildly. "What's Plan B?"

"**RUN!**"

* * * * * * *

"Peter, you really shouldn't have done that," said Egon mildly, as he and the others came to rest near where the woods gave way to open ground.

The dark-haired man was panting heavily but still clutched the barrel of his 'weapon'. "It scared them off, didn't it? I don't think a forest this big is gonna miss a few lousy trees..."

"Yeah, the fire should be out soon," said Janine, her tone becoming even more nasal. "I didn't think you could run that fast, Peter."

"Well, I knew we had to get to the center of that psychic disturbance. We just got there a little sooner than we expected."

Ray consulted his equipment again. "The disturbance is about a hundred yards away--over there." He pointed towards a forbidding stone structure. "Sure is spooky, isn't it?"

"It always is," sighed Peter. It was very quiet now, at the edge of the woods after sunset, and the only thing they heard was their own breathing. The sounds of nocturnal animals were conspicuously absent.

The small group slowly approached the building. As they got nearer, they could gradually make out more detail. It appeared to be some sort of manor or lodge--it was much too small to be a castle--constructed of stone and dark-colored wood. It would have probably looked very pleasant in the daylight.

"So the instrument's in there?" said Winston.

"The readings are identical to the ones we recorded in the firehouse," said Ray.

"Then let's go get it and get back home. There's a Mets game on tonight that I don't want to miss. I hear they're on a winning streak," replied Winston.

"Since when is winning two games a 'streak'?" asked Peter, cautiously opening the double doors and stepping inside. The rest followed him--except for Ray, who was several paces ahead, tracing the location of the energy with his PKE meter inward and then upward. "Sure is spooky," he mumbled to himself after a minute or two.

Suddenly Ray stopped. "Guys," he whispered urgently. "It's straight ahead..."

"...and there's light coming from under the doors," finished Winston softly.

"Why is that room lit? This place is deserted," said Peter, still whispering. He crept closer. "There's **something** in there...and the meter's going wild."

"Let's see what it is," said Egon, thinking they had hesitated far too long. He pushed the doors wide open.

A shriek came from inside and Egon pulled back quickly. The three other professionals pressed forward to see who--or what--had made the sound. They poked their heads around the door and looked in.

"You people, what are you doing here, frightening me half to death?" said an indignant voice. A man in a multi-colored shirt and brown pants rose from a chair, holding a half-finished glass of brandy. "Who are you? We told everyone to keep away from here until we were done!"

"We?" asked Egon, not seeing anyone else. He felt strangely unsure of himself.

"We," said another voice, this one richer than the first. Egon nearly jumped as a shadow detached itself from the wall and came into full view. This was a black-haired man, clad entirely in black as well: long tunic, pants, and high books, all in black.

"Well..." began Egon, not knowing quite where to start; so he turned to the others for help. "Ray, what are you doing?"

"Egon, get **back**," he said, his eyes very wide. The PKE meter in his hands was flashing wildly. With his eyes, Egon followed the line of the directional indicator from the machine.

It was pointing at the pale man in black.

Egon executed a leap of truly amazing proportions and landed next to Peter. "It wasn't the instrument we were picking up," said Ray, the rather frightening truth dawning on him. "It was him."

"And we walked right into a Type 13," moaned Peter.

"Don't worry, guys," Ray said, trying to sound brave. He threw down a small black and yellow striped metal box at the feet of the black-clad apparition. "This trap should do the trick."

"Can a trap hold a Type 13?" asked Peter, preparing himself for certain death.

"Don't know...never had anything stronger than a Type 9..."

"Oh good, Ray," said Peter, grimacing as the top of the trap opened and what looked like a whirlpool of light poured out. "It's not working, Ray..."

"Yeah...strong one, isn't he?"

The man in black had watched all this with a bemused expression on his face. He nudged the open trap with the toe of his right boot. "If I am to understand you correctly," he said, "You mean to put me in that?" He emphasized each pronoun, pausing slightly between them.

"Well...yeah," said Peter, throwing his hands up into the air.

"It's not working," said the man with the multicolored tunic and the brandy. "Perhaps if he lost weight, he might fit."

The dark man looked at him disapprovingly and then turned his attention back to the time travellers. "This device is intriguing, I must say. Why do you wish to place me inside it?" He tapped it again with his foot. "Is it some sort of machine?"

"Well, kind of," admitted Ray. "It's a ghost trap."

The golden-haired man snickered and took another sip of his brandy, now assuming that he and his companion had nothing to fear from the newcomers. "A ghost trap, is it? It sounds like something my father--I mean my unfather--would have sold. Or bought. Yours doesn't seem to be doing its job; how much did you pay for it?"

"We didn't buy them, we made them," answered Ray, who had also by now realized that the Type 13 was, if not completely benign, at least not going to hurt them. The man with him quite clearly knew that the other was a ghost, and it didn't seem to bother him. This was enough to encourage Ray.

"Made them?" Myal asked, eyes widening. "I've never seen anything like them...and you've got these other strange things too..." The man suddenly looked frightened. "Parl...who are these people?"

"I think I'd like to know that as well?" he said, folding his arms across his chest. "You are obviously not one of the villagers, you are wearing clothing of a fabric which I have never seen before, and you are carrying devices which a more superstitious type might identify with black magic. Now tell me--who are you?"

"I'm Ray Stantz," said the short, rather cherubic man in the tan coverall. "This is Egon Spengler," he indicated the tall man with the nearly white bleached hair and red-framed glasses, "Winston Zeddemore," he pointed at the black man wearing light blue, "and Peter Venkman."

"Howdy," said the dark-haired man with a smile. "Now who are you, besides a ghost and his friend?"

The man in black curled his lip up a bit and leaned back. "This is Myal Lemyal, a musician," he said. "And my name is Parl Dro."

"Parl Dro?" yelped Ray. "Parl Dro? Guys, do you know who we're talking to?"

"Yeah, some dead dude named Parl Dro," said Peter. "So what's all the excitement for?"

"Peter, I sometimes wonder why you ever chose parapsychology as a profession when you refuse to learn more of its history," said Egon, who along with Ray had recognized the name.

"Parl Dro was an exorcist, Peter, one of the greatest of all time," explained Ray, noting that the ghost looked mildly pleased. "The stuff we do with our proton packs and scientific equipment he could do with his **mind**. He could trance himself by force of will

alone and all kinds of neat stuff like that...I just never realized he continued the practice after he was dead."

"Hey, it pays well," replied Myal. "So you get rid of deadalive too? Funny, I've never heard of you."

"Um, well, you wouldn't have," said Egon, rubbing his chin. "We've got a problem, you see..."

"Haven't we all," sighed Myal. "Care to tell us about it? Especially since no-one else has ever realized that the great Parl Dro over there is dead?"

"The reason' we've heard of Parl Dro but you haven't heard of us is because we don't exist; well, not yet we don't. We're from the future and we haven't been born yet."

Myal looked confused and turned to Dro, who merely narrowed his eyes and said, "Do go on."

"We're actually from the twentieth century. We're also--I guess you could call us exorcists, although we do handle more varieties of psychic phenomena than ghosts. That's what we were doing when we were shot back to the past, investigating a weird musical instrument that had an amazing amount of supernatural energy tied to it. Peter played something on it and we ended up here; and Egon says that if we re-create what happened before it might be able to get us home. We picked up the same energy readings coming from this place, so we assumed that the instrument was here."

Myal looked at them skeptically, unsure of what to believe. He knew that they were not natives of this area, and their story was so wild that it just might be true...for who would have thought to make up something like that?

"This 'weird' instrument--just how 'weird' was it? Describe it to me."

"It had two necks with strings that crossed each other," said Ray. "And it had a mouthpiece too; I think it was ivory. Um...let me see...there were little things inlaid in the wood, and the strap holding it was made out of leather."

"That sounds a lot like mine," said Myal thoughtfully.

"As if it could be anyone else's," replied Dro. "I believe your story."

"I do too," said Myal. "And it would make a great song. Picture this...four people suddenly thrust back into the mists of time, their only means of escape a handsome, heroic, and immensely talented musician..."

"Not four people," corrected Egon.

"How many besides you?" asked Myal, undaunted by the prospect of adding in more to the song.

"Well, there's Janine and...maybe it'll be easier if we bring them in here. Janine, Slimer," called Peter. "That's Janine," he said as she entered the room.

"Is it safe to come in now?" asked Janine. "I heard voices..."

Just then Myal caught sight of Slimer. "Aaghh! It's a giant green potato with teeth!" he cried.

"No, that's just Slimer," said Peter, highly amused at Myal's reaction. "He's not pretty, but he is harmless. Just don't let him...oh well," he finished, seeing he was too late.

"Yecch," said Myal, wiping off his hand on one of the window's heavy orange curtains. Slimer had evidently thought it would be polite to shake hands, and now extended one to Parl Dro, who took a step backward and shook his head. Peter laughed.

By this time, Myal had recovered his dignity and was now eyeing Janine appreciatively. "Hello, my dear, he said, bowing. "My name is Myal Lemyal, and I am a musician of the highest order. How may I serve you?"

Janine was unimpressed. "You can start by introducing me to your friend over there," she said, going up to the exorcist. "My name is Janine Melnitz..what's yours?"

Parl Dro executed a sweeping bow which Myal thought was extremely showy (and totally unnecessary). "Parl Dro, at your service," he smiled. Myal rolled his eyes and thought to himself that most women he met had bad taste when it came to men.

"Ooh," Janine giggled. "Pleased to meet you, Mr. Dro..."

"No need to be so formal, my dear..."

Myal looked helplessly at the others. "He always does this to me, you know. And at his age, too--you'd never think that he was my **father**, would you?" he said, raising his voice a bit to be sure the attractive young woman in the revealing outfit heard.him. If she did, she didn't acknowledge it. "I can't win?" complained the musician.

"He's your **father**?" asked Ray.

"There was never any data on Parl Dro referring to a son," said Egon. "Fascinating."

"I'll explain it to you later," Myal replied morosely.

"Usually she's after Egon," whispered Peter. "I guess she likes that type."

Egon cleared his throat. "Janine," he said. "Parl Dro is an exorcist, and Myal's the one who made the instrument that brought us here. With their help we should be able to get back to New York. Incidentally, Parl Dro, the man you're talking to, is dead."

Janine raised an eyebrow. "A dead exorcist?"

"Yeah," replied Peter. "Talk about a conflict of interests."

"You're telling me," said Myal.

"So you made the two-necked guitar?" she asked, looking at him. "Did they tell you what we need to use it for? Will you help us?"

"I'd be glad to help you," said Myal, looking rather nervous. "But I'm afraid there's a slight problem..."

"What? The instrument's yours, isn't it?"

"Well, yes, in a manner of speaking...but the truth is I can't help you now."

"Why not?!" demanded Peter.

Myal picked up a leather bag that had been resting on one of the chairs. He opened it and withdrew several pieces of wood--the bodies of a guitar and a mandolin. "I'm sorry," he said miserably, "but the first one was smashed to bits and the new one isn't finished yet. I still have to put the two soundboxes together, and I need better pegs for the strings and I haven't even got a reed yet. I'm really sorry."

"Don't worry about it," said Peter. "We could all use a vacation anyway. How long will it take you to finish it?"

"If I had the rest of the parts I needed, I might be able to have it done in a week."

"Hey, no problem," Peter said, smiling. "We can wait a week, can't we?"

"Sure," replied Ray amiably. "And I want to hear all about what you guys do..."

"Only if you tell us about yourselves too; especially you, Janine. To be fair and all that. Do all women in the twentieth century wear such short--I mean interesting--articles of clothing?"

"What were you doing in this place?" interrupted Ray before their secretary could respond. Knowing Janine, she might seriously injure the minstrel.

"We were here to dispel a deadalive--in your terms, a ghost," replied Parl Dro. "This manor belongs to a minor nobleman who has just inherited this land and its holdings. He'd heard the rumors that there were deadalive here, and--"

"And we just happened to be in the area," finished Myal. "Sir Walter recognized Parl--thanks to a few well-dropped hints--and asked him if he could exorcise the spirit. We accepted...for a modest fee of course."

"Of course," said Parl, leaning back in his chair. "My 'apprentice' believes that I did not ask for enough money for the task."

"You **didn't**."

"This ghost could barely manifest itself beyond transparency. Besides, he wanted to leave. He showed us where the link was."

"You still should have asked for more," said Myal sullenly, but with a twinkle in his eyes. "So why don't you people tell us about what you do--maybe you could pick up a few things, 'eh Dad?" he grinned cheekily.

"There are times when I have serious difficulties believing that you are my son. This is one of those times..."

During the banter between Parl and Myal, Myal and Janine, and Peter and everybody, each group managed to learn a good amount of information about the other. There were somewhat condensed explanations ("He's really my father, really..."), of their situations ("You call yourselves what?"), and their professions ("You 'bust' them. I...see."). The exorcist did not take too well to the concept of the Containment Unit until they explained that most of what they dealt with were not actual ghosts, but other types of supernatural beings, and that they were only called in when these beings were obviously destructive in nature. Myal had listened to this and decided he would rather question Janine about the length of her skirt some more when there came a sudden pounding on the outside door of the manor.

"Myal, go answer the door," said Parl.

The musician grumbled, thwarted again in his attempt to gain Janine's interest. "I don't see why I should have to. Why don't you? That leg of yours shouldn't hurt anymore, now that you know you're a ghost. But I'll do it anyway out of the goodness of my heart." With that, he hauled himself out of the chair. The exorcist smiled indulgently at him and made shooing motions with his hands.

Several minutes later, Myal came hurrying back to the room. His face was very pale. "Parl..." he began, trying to catch his breath. "Those villagers that saw Janine and the others...they followed them here. They think that the 'demons' have taken over the manor and we can't get rid of them."

Parl Dro stood up. "We shall have to see about that. I'll explain that these people are foreigners, travellers who have lost their way, and we're letting them stay here for the night--out of the goodness of our hearts." He walked out of the room.

"Oh, the poor man, he's limping," said Janine in sympathy. "What happened to him?"

"He got his leg chopped off by my mother's husband, after it was nearly chewed off by a deadalive," said Myal. "I think it's out of pure stubbornness that he still limps. I just hope he can talk our way out of what's downstairs."

"Do you think he can?" asked Ray.

"If anyone can, it would be him. But even his silver tongue might not do the trick this time."

They heard him coming up the stairs soon after, his distinctive gait telling them that it was indeed him and not one of the men from the village. He looked as if things had not gone well.

"What happened? Did they believe you?" asked Myal anxiously.

"They believe," he said, pausing for a second, "that we have been possessed by the evil spirits here and that we are not responsible for our actions. They said they are going to 'free' us by destroying the manor--along with everything and everyone in it--which they presume will dispel the spirits. They're planning to come back at dawn."

"How will they destroy the manor?" asked Ray.

"Burn it down, I suppose," said the exorcist. "But not if they see the demons leave."

"Oh wonderful," moaned Peter. "How do we do that? We can't just disappear in a puff of smoke."

"You could," said Parl, coming over to stand beside his son, "if the instrument is done by then."

"Oh **no**," said the golden-haired man. "Do you know what it would take to finish it by morning? I'd have to work all night, non-stop."

"Would you rather see the manor burned down, your new-found friends killed, and yourself at the mercy of the villagers' attempts at exorcism?"

"Well, when you put it that way..." he said worriedly. "But I still need new pegs and a reed...oh, I suppose I could use the old pegs for now. I've got all the other parts, and I've got the tools with me too."

"Splendid. I shall provide you with the reed."

"How?" asked Ray.

Parl Dro smiled. "One of the advantages of this state of being is the ability to be...unobtrusive." He disappeared.

Myal was still for a moment, watching something the others couldn't see. "He's gone," he said. "I guess he's off to the village to find something suitable."

"We'll do anything we can to help you in the construction," said Egon.

"I hope we can pull this off," said Peter. "Or else we're gonna die before we were even born."

* * * * * * *

Myal began his task. The others sat at a table around him, watching the musician work, but it was very late and they were all trying not to fall asleep. "We can at least stay up with you," insisted Egon. Myal nodded and, to help keep everyone (including himself) awake, told stories of his adventures and also gave a more detailed account of his original meeting with Parl Dro. He didn't quite understand Peter's comment that there was probably a great disco in Ghyste Mortua called "Studio 666", but he did generously return the other man's wallet, which he had stolen from him several hours before.

"Y'know," said Peter, putting his wallet back into his pocket, "I think Parl should get a new tailor. I mean, black all the time gets to be depressing after a while. We could take him back to Greenwich Village, and get him fixed up real nice."

"Yeah Peter, I'm sure he'd like that," snorted Janine.

"Why not?" he asked, grinning. "We could get him some jams and a Hawaiian shirt. Something to brighten things up."

"I think he looks fine the way he is," said Janine. "Besides, he told me that I had lovely auburn hair."

Myal paled noticeably. "But he's my father," he sputtered.

"So?"

"But he's dead?"

"Nobody's perfect," Janine said smugly.

"But really," continued Peter, "someone should introduce him to the joys of multichromatic clothing...unless it's just that everyone who's dead likes to wear black. Like your old girlfriend, Ray."

"She wasn't my girlfriend," protested Ray weakly.

"Ooh, is there a story behind this?" asked Myal, who had just finished fitting the two soundboxes together.

"I thought we agreed--" Ray began.

"But this time it really does pertain to the case, doesn't it Egon--she registered as a Type 13 also," said Winston.

"True," Egon said. "But she wasn't exactly the same as Parl Dro."

"You bet she wasn't," said Peter, winking at Ray. "You see Myal, one time Ray over there met this girl dressed all in black, just like your father. Admittedly it was a black miniskirt, but you get the picture." Myal nodded enthusiastically. "Same idea, right? They both like black. Anyway, she and Ray went out a few times, and he kept telling us about this wonderful girl he'd met. One day he brought her back to meet us, and we just happened to have our PKE meters on...and the readings went off the scale. She was a ghost, sort of, and she registered higher than anything we'd ever seen--until now."

"Why did you say she was 'sort of' a ghost?" questioned Myal, fitting a peg into place.

"Because she wasn't really a ghost--she wasn't a human who had died. Whatever she was, she had always been that way. She didn't realize she would register on our PKE meters."

"Was she completely solid, like Parl?"

"I wouldn't know. Was she completely solid, Ray?"

"Are you ever going to let up on me about that?" sighed the other man.

"Only teasing, Ray. How ya doin', Myal?"

"All I need now is the reed," he announced proudly. He took the nearly completed instrument in his hands and began to play, as he had longed to since the first had been destroyed on the hill by the Ghyste.

The others sat very still and listened. "Myal, that was beautiful," whispered Janine when he had finished.

"It was indeed," said Parl Dro, appearing suddenly beside them. He held out something to Myal. "Will this do?"

Myal examined it and smiled happily. "It's perfect. Thank you."

"You'd better hurry. The villagers are gathering on the outskirts of town, with lit torches."

"Lovely," said Peter. Myal winced and hurriedly prepared the reed as Egon and Parl made their plans; Parl would perform an 'exorcism' out in the clearing, while Myal would hide nearby waiting for his cue to play. Peter had taught him the two lines earlier. ("You got it, Myal?" "Yeah--'Welcome my friends to the show that never ends'. No problem.")

"There," Myal said wearily, leaning back and rubbing his eyes. "It's finished."

"And just in time, too," remarked Parl. "There's noise coming from outside. It's almost dawn; we should get to our positions."

"Problem," said Egon, aiming his PKE meter at the instrument. "The only protonic anomaly in this room is you."

"What?" yelped Peter. "We haven't come this far to be stopped <u>now</u>! If this thing doesn't have any energy in it, we won't be able to get home and then we're gonna be torched by those crazy...hold on, I think I'm getting an idea," he said, a crafty look coming into his eyes. "Maybe we can use our equipment to channel some of Parl's psychokinetic energy <u>into</u> the instrument."

"It's certainly worth a shot," said Ray.

"Hurry, guys," urged Janine, looking nervously out the window. "Those people out there don't look very friendly."

"But the original energy in that thing when we found it counted as Type 13," protested Winston. "That's what Parl is--what'll the transfer do to **him**?"

"We don't need **all** his energy," said Egon. "But it would probably weaken him tremendously. I don't know if he would be strong enough afterwards to--"

"Use some of mine," Myal interjected, then saw the look the exorcist was giving him. "You've done it before."

"Myal, I will <u>not</u> feed off you again. The amount I would have to draw from you could kill you."

"Egon, would it kill me? Would he have to take that much?"

Egon shook his head. "There's no way to tell. Even so, you might not be able to play."

"Me, not able to play?" said Myal indignantly. "Don't be absurd! And Parl, don't you argue with me. You can't do this on your own. I'm your son--let me help you."

The older man realized that any further protest would be ignored. "As you wish," he said mildly, and laid his hands on Myal's shoulders. The others watched in fascination as the lifeforce flowed from one to the other. The exorcist caught Myal as he fell forward, and eased him down into a chair. "Rest."

"You don't have to tell me twice," he mumbled. "I've gotta play, though."

"Soon, Myal," he said, and turned to the others. "Egon, I'm ready."

"Just put your hands on this and relax. Let the machine do the work."

It took several minutes to complete the transfer, and when it was over Parl Dro was visibly less solid than he had been. Myal, watching from his chair as his strength returned, marveled that he had never seen the others so insubstantial. Dro was too good at 'impersonation' to be seen as transparent.

Egon held the meter toward the instrument. "It worked," he said, his usual restraint not quite doing its job. "Are you two ready?"

Myal nodded. Parl straightened up, narrowed his eyes, and suddenly he appeared fully solid. "How do I look?" he asked, smiling.

"Wonderful," said Janine.

"Then let's party!" Peter cried.

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"People," announced Parl Dro in his most theatrical voice. "I bring before you these evil spirits to be banished. It will be difficult, even for an exorcist of my abilities, and I ask all of you to help me by concentrating that they be sent back to the place from whence they came. Will you do that?"

A loud cheer came from the crowd in affirmation. "He'll be asking them to believe in Tinkerbell next," muttered Winston.

"Thank you, my friends," called Dro. "I shall begin."

"He's actually <u>enjoying</u> this," whispered Peter, folding his arms and edging back towards the bonfire that Parl had told the townspeople was necessary for the exorcism. In point of fact, it was merely a good focus for their attention, as well as something to burn besides the manor.

"No wonder he's enjoying it," chuckled Ray. "He's got them eating out of his hand."

"It's almost time," Egon whispered. "I hope Myal's ready." He peered at the trees nearby, knowing that the minstrel was hidden somewhere within. Fortunately, the fire also kept the crowd's attention away from the woods.

"And so," said Parl, going into what Winston told him was called a big finish, "I cast this object upon the flames, and in doing so I cast the demons back into the fiery pit of hell...now!" He lobbed a small sack into the bonfire, which had been filled with what Peter had termed a 'Molotov Cocktail'. The flames leapt twice their height into the air, causing the villagers to jump back. They were so shocked they never even heard the first strains of Karn Evil 9.

"The demons..they're gone!" cried someone.

"Oh thank you, Parl Dro," somebody else said as they clustered around the man, to congratulate him on his valiant and noble deed.

Myal chose that moment to come out of the forest. "You people there, help me put this fire out," he called imperiously. "Parl Dro has gotten rid of your demons for you; we can't have him burned to a crisp afterwards." The people nodded guiltily. "Now," continued Myal. "About our fee..."

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"Ouch!" said Janine, landing on top of Peter. "Oh Egon, did I hurt you?"

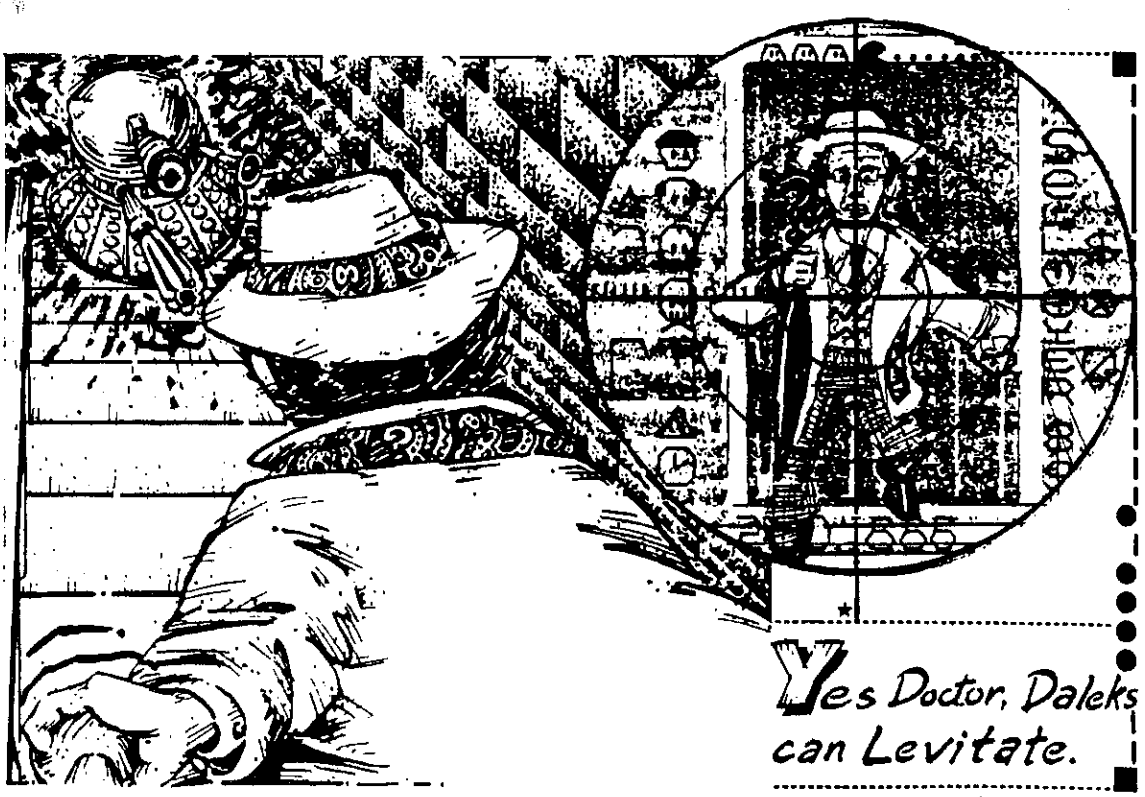
"Did you hurt **him**?" echoed Peter. "Your stiletto heels puncture **my** ribs and you ask Egon if you hurt **him**? That's it, I've had enough of this. I've been chased by peasants, insulted by a ghost, and nearly burned alive. I've had it! I'm exhausted and I'm going to bed!" At this point the phone rang and Ray staggered over to answer it. Peter continued ranting. "And I don't want any of you waking me up for anything, have you got that? Not anything, not even if I've just been nominated for the Nobel Prize! And--and--and that little sneak stole my wallet again!" he yelled. "I can see it now--'Medieval Mastercard Baffles the World's Top Scientists--Peter Venkman Being Sought for Inquiry'..."

"Quiet, Peter!" said Ray excitedly. "It's Disneyworld!"

"Disneyworld?" he asked incredulously. "What could possibly go wrong at Disneyworld? I suppose the Haunted House is really haunted, right?"

"Gee, Peter, how did you know?" Ray asked. "Don't worry, sir, we'll be there as soon as possible...guys, you should hear what's going on in the Hall of Presidents..."

"I knew I shouldn't have gotten out of bed this morning," moaned Peter.



State of Siege

by Jeff Morris

art by Karen River

Deep within the bowels of his citadel, the Black King sat upon his Throne of Darkness and considered the situation.

From here, like some malevolent spider lurking in a web of evil, he could see and hear everything in the world beyond. His eyes and ears missed nothing, sending every tidbit of information, no matter how trivial, to their Master. His marionettes danced or fell at his whim; he had merely to order and it would be done. The world might well walk boldly in the sunlight, but it feared the darkness...and its evil master.

All save one man and his companions. Buckaroo Banzai and his Hong Kong Cavaliers had been a constant thorn in his side for far too long. Time and again, his schemes had been thwarted through their meddling. This had gone on far too long without reprisal. He was the Master of Darkness, the Light of Evil. These fools must learn to fear the darkness and its power once and for all.

Hanoi Xan lifted a finger. When it fell, so too would the Banzai Institute.

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Perfect Tommy was tired of Jet Cars, tired of concert dates and photographic sessions. He was bored with researching new physics problems; superconductors had no hold on his mind. He needed a break, a different kind of excitement.

So he had fled the Institute without telling anyone and was now in one of the hottest, swankiest discos in New York. No one recognized him as the Cavalier; he was merely a good-looking man on the prowl for excitement.

The instant his gaze fell upon her, he knew that she was what he was looking for. Long, wildly-arrayed black hair, hypnotic green eyes, soft red lips, dark skin, and a body that promised greater delights than one man could stand moved invitingly before him. He could sense her desire, could feel her body move against his in the throes of passion.

Without a spoken word, they met on the floor and began to dance. When the music ended, she tilted her head towards the door with an inquiring glance. The offer was clear. Tommy smiled hungrily and put his arm around her, reeling at the proximity of her body to his.

He found himself burning with desire for her, completely at her mercy and not caring a whit. He pulled her close and kissed her fiercely, groaning as she responded in kind. His hands roughly caressed her silken body as they writhed against each other. Her magnificent mouth slid down his throat, kissing and sucking at him until it was just over his jugular.

There was a brief flash of pain, then an incredible sense of euphoria that overwhelmed his senses. He barely felt the blow to the head a second later. Tommy reeled, still entranced by the vixen's sensual spell, and hit the wall hard. Two men grabbed him, threw him into a nearby alley, then followed him inside.

He never had a chance.

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"Geez, it's hot tonight," Pinky Carruthers griped, wiping the sweat off his brow. He dried his hand on a pant leg and set his trademark beret back upon his head. "Wish I was inside with the rest of the gang."

"Ah, it's not so bad," replied Red Rover. "It's just that it's so boring tonight. Guard duty crawls when it's muggy--nothing ever happens..."

At that moment, a truck came screeching down the road, thundering towards the gates of the Institute. "Spoke too soon," Rover muttered as he took up a defensive position, guns at the ready. Pinky was already stationed opposite him, his face grim with anticipation. Perhaps it was nothing more than a few kids out for a joyride, but it never paid to be less than vigilant here at the Institute. One slip-up could literally be your last.

The van must have been doing 45, Rover later estimated in his report. As it passed the front gates, the side panel door whipped open, and something wrapped in a blanket was shoved out. It landed with an ugly thud on the grassy median. The van careened back into the main lines of traffic and sped away.

"Get a make?" Pinky hollered.

"Gotta be joking," Rover shook his head. "Come on, let's see what they dropped off. Get the metal detectors, I'll call the UXB boys." They scrambled down from the parapets

and hurried over to where the object lay; Pinky held the curiosity seekers at bay while Rover summoned additional help.

To no one's surprise, Buckaroo was among the newcomers minutes later. "What've we got?" he quietly asked Pinky as the Institute's bomb squad gave the object a once over. Pinky started to explain, but a soft groan coming from the heavily-bundled parcel shut everybody up.

With deliberate care, Buckaroo stepped forward and started unbinding the prisoner, giving the bomb squad plenty of room to operate as he worked. Once the ropes were snapped, the coverings were painstakingly removed one by one, with the squad scrutinizing each new level before allowing Buckaroo to proceed. It was rather like peeling an onion, Pinky thought to himself, you kept going down, level after level, wondering if anything would remain at the core...

"Gods preserve us," Buckaroo whispered as the final blanket fell open. Pinky took one look and raced for the telephone. "Code Blue at front gate!" he barked into the receiver. "Set up med ward, get an ambulance team up here stat!" He started back to the scene, then remembered to grab the first-aid kit from the shelf. For all the good it would do, he thought ruefully. Tommy looked all but dead.

Buckaroo took the kit from him without thanks, starting immediately to peel away the torn remains of Tommy's clothing and clean off the blood and refuse that caked his skin. Pinky heard the ambulance wail as it approached, and cursed himself for not getting additional security to hold back the crowds, then saw Rawhide, Reno, and several other Cavaliers running towards the scene. As they arrived, the crowd was politely but firmly pushed to one side, giving the ambulance room to pull up. Tommy was quickly bundled onto a stretcher and whisked into the van. As it shot back towards the infirmary, Rover and Pinky managed to shut the doors before any onlookers could sneak inside...or so they thought at the time.

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The ambulance roared into the infirmary; Buckaroo reluctantly left his friend in the care of the Code Team in order to check on the progress of locating his attackers. The crack medical squad was ready and waiting at the door to the infirmary. As Tommy was wheeled in, they pounced upon him and set to work. "Get an endotrachael tube down him, what's pulse and b.p.?" Little Red crisply fired off. Various orders and bits of information flew back and forth as they struggled to preserve the faint signs of life in their comrade.

Dr. Midnite, the former Vietnam surgeon that was now the E.R.specialist for the Institute, gave a speedy list of Tommy's injuries into the recorder mike around his neck. "Patient appears to have severe trauma to the head, possible fracture, apparent compound fractures of the left and right radius, fracture of the left fibia, and possible fracture of three ribs on the right side. Patient appears to be in shock, possible internal bleeding, blood pressure 60 over 20, pulse weak and fluttering. Okay people, let's get some pictures stat, start him on an IV, central line, cross-match for about 6 units of O Positive for openers. Flo, call out the donors, it's going to be one of those nights. Accept no excuses. Red, slip in a Foley, and prep him for the Big Show. We've got a long one coming up."

His eyes fell upon Little Red; the fiesty nurse momentarily lost her professional cool to her turbulent emotions. "I'll do what I can, Red," he quietly assured her. "Okay, someone get the Boss on the line, see if he can come out to play. Oh,and grab Zweibel too, if you can. Many hands make light work, and we're fighting the clock on this one. Let's go!"

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Bird was one of the newer recruits to the Institute. A tall, lanky fellow with tossled red hair, he had been accepted for his mean sax playing as well as his work in microbiology. At the moment, however, he was patrolling the Institute grounds on Security detail.

He was a recent graduate of Pinky's "How To" course, and so was on full alert, especially considering what had just happened at the front gates. But he was no match for a trained assassin of Hanoi Xan's.

The killer dragged the body behind a small cluster of bushes and continued on his mission.

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"How is he?" Princess asked her husband.

"Midnite and the others are working on him now," Nightowl replied, rubbing his neck wearily. "It doesn't look good, hon." She bit her lip and hugged him tightly, shuddering at the memory of Tommy's broken body.

"Where's Jessie?" he asked softly.

"With Pecos. Red must be torn apart," she said quietly.

"I dunno, babe. She might be all the more determined to save his life, and you know how Red is when she gets her mind set on something..." Just then, Dallas stepped softly into the room. "What's up, they get a make on the van?"

"Didn't need to," the tall black man shook his head. "Billy picked up a police report about five minutes ago. A blue van which matched Pinky and Rover's description was found smashed into a telephone pole. Bodies were cold when they got to 'em. Cyanide."

Nightowl's jaw set tightly. "Xan."

"Safe bet. Plus, there's another problem. We got a bogie on the grounds. Must have slipped in during the confusion. Want to come have a look?"

"I'm in," Nightowl declared, taking his gun from his arm holster.

"So am I," Princess chimed in. Before either man could dissuade her, she set her chin high and said, "I am a full-ranking intern of the Institute, and the more people we have searching the grounds, the faster we will find the intruder. Shall we go?"

Neither Cavalier could frame a rejoinder to that, so they gave in to the inevitable and followed her out.

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Tommy was just about prepped and ready for business when Little Red's voice exploded from the surgery speakers. "DON'T PUT HIM UNDER!"

Dr. Midnite glanced over to the entry doors, where Red stood gesturing wildly. "What's up?"

"Try a healthy dose of MAO inhibitors," she retorted. "You give him some anesthesia, and he'll stroke out for sure!"

"Well for God's sake, we hold off on him until the stuff's worn off, we won't have a patient!" Midnite cursed. "Where the hell is the Boss, anyway?"

"He's got troubles on the grounds. Look, you're always telling Suzy Q and Alamo what hot stuff you are--find a way to operate and save his life!"

"Damn, damn, damn," Midnite grumbled, then his face brightened. "Okay, boys and girls. Get me a drip set up--use Hyperstat. That ought to keep things smooth for long enough."

"You kill him and I'll never forgive you," Red warned.

"Take a number and wait in line. Now, let's go in."

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Dallas frowned as he crept through the Japanese garden. The lack of moonlight, coupled with the knowledge that somewhere, someone was sneaking about, made him suspicious of every shadow, every shrub and tree branch.

Nightowl had been the one to find Bird; the young intern's neck had been neatly slit. Had it not been for the wet, sticky pool of blood lying in the grass, it might have taken longer for the body to be discovered. Dallas had immediately upcoded the situation.

Dallas sighed and decided to check in with the others when his Go-phone beeped. "Dallas, this is Nightowl. Had any luck so far?"

"You kidding? It would be a new moon. How bout you, Princess?"

"Negative. It's blacker than..." Her voice vanished from the go-phone speaker. Nightowl wasted not an instant on panic, but raced at top speed towards her last marked position.

He and Dallas reached the clearing at the same time. Princess lay motionless on the ground, a black pool seeping from beneath her. "Oh damn, I just knew it," Nightowl cried out, rolling his wife onto her back. "Stab wound. Looks deep."

"All right, call a stretcher and stay with her. I'm going to take a look around."

"Dallas, for all we know that lunatic might still be out here..." Nightowl turned away instinctively as a shuriken hissed just past his head. "As I was saying..."

The two Cavaliers stood close to Princess' body, glancing warily about. "What direction did it come from, Owl?" Dallas whispered.

"Over there. Doesn't mean a thing, though. He could be long gone by now."

"Call in that stretcher." Another throwing star shot by. "Damn, he doesn't like that idea, does he?"

"Wonder why," Nightowl muttered. "Look, let's split up and try. Free hand goes for the Go-phone."

"Okay...now!" They broke away in opposite directions; Dallas barely dodged a silent arrow that thudded into a nearby tree. Nightowl took advantage of the interlude and hit the "panic button". "Got 'em, Dallas!"

"Great, now let's try to stay alive to meet 'em!" Dallas hit the dirt to avoid another arrow, but Nightowl smiled grimly and opened fire in the direction of the arrow's origin. There was a piercing scream, followed by a shadowy figure racing towards the woods.

"Well? Aren't you gonna chase him?" Dallas demanded.

"Surely you jest." Nightowl whipped out his modified Luger and took careful aim.

The first shot slammed into the assassin's left kneecap.

The second's results would require extensive corrective surgery on the right femur.

The third rendered his right arm useless.

The fourth would make sitting a rather painful matter for some time.

Dallas shook his head. "Showoff."

"Practice," Nightowl grinned, then his face grew somber. "I'll go keep Fred there from offing himself. You see to Princess, okay?" When his comrade nodded, the marksman Cavalier raced off towards his fallen foe.

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"Glad to see you can make it, Boss," Dr. Midnite glanced up as Buckaroo stepped into the O.R. "Just finishing up the patch job on his spleen."

Buckaroo peered down. "Nice work, very neat, as always." He glanced around the room. "Where are the CAT results?"

As if on cue, Little Red slammed through the doors. "Right here, Boss!" She quickly slid the videotape into the O.R.'s machine and activated it.

"Mmmm. Looks like a subdural hematoma, hairline fracture. Looks like he got a bit lucky." He turned to Suzy Q. "Get me my number 10 drill."

"Ah yes, Black and Decker--the surgeon's best friend," Midnite remarked from Tommy's chest. "Okay, Grace, give me some suction there...ah, very good."

Buckaroo's drill whined into life. "What about the limb fractures?"

"Grace and Corpsman are setting 'em." Midnite sniffed the air. "Smells like Tommy's got a thick skull."

"I'll pass on the straight line." Buckaroo turned off the drill and handed it back to Suzy Q. "Almost finished?"

"Getting there..." Midnite grimaced slightly. "Where's Sid?"

"Thought it might be best if we had a free hand in E.R.," Buckaroo replied absently. "Never know what might come up, and with you in here..."

"Very true. Wonder what the hell happened to Tommy?"

"I'm not sure I want to know..."

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"Aw, come on Flo!" Billy protested, but the RN simply stood there, implacable as ever. "Look, I'm trying to scan the area's police reports for a clue to what happened to Tommy!"

"And I need some blood for him," she replied calmly. "And you're O positive. Therefore..." She lifted the transfusion bag into view. It never failed to get a good response; Billy paled.

"Look, Flo," he pleaded. "Can we do it here so that I can keep an eye on the computer?"

"Sure, so long as you're prone." She pointed to the couch. "Over there, and bare that arm."

* * * * * * *

"What in the hell do you think you're doing?" asked a bemused Rawhide.

Nightowl had his right hand in the assassin's mouth, struggling to keep the wounded killer at bay. "It's to...ouch!...keep him from biting down on his cyanide tooth...damn it, cut that out!" With his free hand, Nightowl lowered his gun down into the killer's face. "You currently have two nostrils. Want to make it three?" Predicably, the stranger ceased his struggles. "Okay, Rawhide, what do we do with him?"

"I've already called for another stretcher," the big man drawled. "When it gets here, we'll take him to the main building and talk to him. You get that tooth yet, Owl, or do you just like sticking your fingers in peoples' mouths? Get with it, you don't know where he's been."

With a sudden wrench and spurt of blood, Nightowl pulled his hand free and revealed his prize. "Oops," he gasped in surprise. "Wrong tooth. Okay, jerk, open wide...we'll do this until we get it right..."

And without warning, the black sky roared into brilliant daylight. It sounded as though a jet aircraft was firing its engines nearby; the ground trembled violently, knocking everyone off-balance. The intruder seized his opportunity and bit down hard on his tooth. No one, not even Nightowl, noticed his subsequent death. Their eyes were arrested by a more horrifying sight.

"Dear God," Nightowl whispered. "The Institute...it's burning!"

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Pecos struggled to keep conscious; it was difficult to keep her eyes open, what with the smoke and blood all around. She bit her lip hard and hugged the remains of the floor. "The children," she reminded herself. "You've got to find the children..."

One moment, all had been peaceful and serene. She'd been in the kitchen, fixing some graham crackers and milk while Jessalyn and her own child Johnny were watching the Transformers on television. There had been some explosion outside, then without warning, the world around her shattered.

Had she been knocked out? How long? The children...she crawled to where she thought the family room was, and cried out--the entire area was ablaze. Nothing could possibly survive such an inferno...

Something soft and cool brushed against her. Pecos glanced over at the object and almost cried out in relief--it was the arm of a child, Jessalyn from the look of it. She tugged at the limb, thankful that the little girl came to her easily. "One down, one to go..." she whispered.

Miraculously, her own son was close by. She scooped the body up and crawled to the nearest window, dragging the unconscious forms behind her. It took every ounce of strength she had to pull herself up to the sill. She slammed her palms against the frame; the window refused to budge. Pecos grit her teeth and with a blood-curdling scream slammed her fist through the glass. She patted around her on the floor, found a blunt object--one of Johnny's hobby horses--and shattered the remaining glass out of the frame. Then she pulled herself up to the now-open sill again and looked out.

It was a straight drop to the ground, about two or three stories. Broken bones at the very least. But she couldn't stay here with the kids. What to do?

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Mrs. Johnson watched the fiery remains of the main building with a desperate eye, trying to find any sign of anyone who might still be trapped there. Billy had come out with Flo almost immediately, the transfusion needle still in his arm. Comanche had stumbled out the back door of the kitchen, an ugly gash over his right eye. Alamo had had to drag an unconscious Professor Hikita up two flights of stairs to safety; the old man had been working in his sub-basement lab at the time.

Rawhide had come out of nowhere a few minutes ago with several stunned Cavaliers in tow, along with two stretchers. He'd taken charge immediately, sending Reno and Nightowl to the infirmary (thank God, whoever had done this had missed the infirmary) with Princess and the dead intruder, while he and Dallas raced to the stables to save the horses. It had been a good thing, in retrospect, to get Reno away. Mrs. Johnson still hadn't found Pecos or the kids.

There had only been one brief fight. Dallas had ordered Mrs. Johnson to call the New Brunswick Fire Department, and Rawhide had instantly belayed it. "We can't let any more outsiders in!" he'd bellowed over the roar of the flames. "Security would be breached!"

"Can it get any worse than now, Rawhide?" Dallas had cried. "Get the firemen out here so we can save something!" His impassioned pleadings had won out over Rawhide's better judgement; even now, she could hear the wail of sirens as the engines neared the Institute.

Suddenly there was a movement up on the third story--someone was still up there! "Quick--get a ladder, a net, something!" she cried out to several interns who had been standing there, mesmerized by the slow death of a dream. One of Reno's assistants, a talented young woman named Rio, nodded and took two interns with her towards the garage. There was safety equipment in there, and though the place was also ablaze, there was a chance that it hadn't quite gotten to the stuff yet.

Sure enough, they quickly returned with bad news--there was nothing to be found. Mrs. Johnson watched in despair as the figure up there leaned out--"Oh God, it's Pecos!" Suddenly there was a loud commotion, and she turned in mute amazement to see a dozen interns dragging a huge trampoline towards the blazing building.

Pecos didn't hesitate. The instant the trampoline was in position, she leaped from the window, holding the children tightly against her. She hit the net hard, bounced high into the night, and bounced a few more times before coming to rest. The interns wasted no time in looking for a stretcher (those were in high demand all night), but instead dragged the trampoline towards the infirmary.

Mrs. Johnson sighed in momentary relief, then gasped as the fire exploded again from the remains of the Institute into the night.

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In San Diego, the local Blue Blaze Irregular headquarters was firebombed. Six people trapped inside were killed in the inferno.

In Portland, three Blue Blazes who had just recently been interviewed in the local paper were found in an alley...and a few of the local parks...and in a special delivery package to the city police department.

In Peoria, five cars belonging to Banzai Institute personnel exploded in different parts of the city. Three of the car owners escaped injury, but two did not.

Several radio stations across the county which carried Buckaroo Banzai's weekly radio address received bomb threats. In three cases, these proved to be true. Of those three, two were successfully disarmed.

After the initial shock, the nation took one of two attitudes. The first decried the senseless terrorism and urged the Banzai Institute to stand tall against the threat.

The other attitude urged for Buckaroo Banzai and his crew to disband and leave the planet as soon as possible.

The dawn was just rising over the horizon by the time the fire was extinguished. Buckaroo and the other Cavaliers walked around the charred ruins, utterly despondent at the loss of years of work and life. The smoldering ashes stirred faintly in the morning air, giving many a grateful Cavalier an excuse for tear-streaked eyes.

Buckaroo alone viewed the remains with his eternally placid expression. "At least we didn't lose anyone to the fire," he remarked quietly to Rawhide. "A shame about Bird, though. I'll have to notify his family. Rawhide, I want every apprentice and intern out of here--all non-essential personnel. Send them home, as quickly and as unobtrusively as possible. For their own safety."

Rawhide nodded tiredly; he and Reno had spent most of the night rescuing the livestock from the inferno they'd found in the barn. Unfortunately, one of Rawhide's prize stallions had been lost in the blaze. "Billy's logged on in the infirmary. Good thing our computers weren't in the main building."

"I know, it could have been a lot worse if they had." Buckaroo turned as Nightowl trudged up. "How's Princess? And Jessalyn?"

"Both doing about as well as can be expected." Nightowl yawned and ran his fingers absently through his soot-stained hair. "Red wants blood donors, and volunteers to help out in the infirmary. It's pretty hectic in there right now--I just finished up a turn."

"I'll head down there in a moment," Buckaroo agreed. "How is Billy doing on tracking down information on Tommy?"

"Right now, he's got teams of Blue Blazes looking in a five-block radius of every 'in' disco for his car," the dark-haired Cavalier replied. "He's also running periodic scans on the police and newspaper computers--I suggested he check the gossip columns."

"Might turn up something," Buckaroo conceded. "He get a make on our visitor?"

"Yeah--lemme see," the big man drawled as he rustled through a sheaf of papers. "Here we go--Le Tron, pretty popular with Interpol, the Yard--all the big boys. Specialty is sabotage, and word on the vine says he got a big contract recently from Sabah. Well, guess we know what for, now..."

"I read the wire reports," Buckaroo said quietly. "Xan wanted to make sure we got his little message."

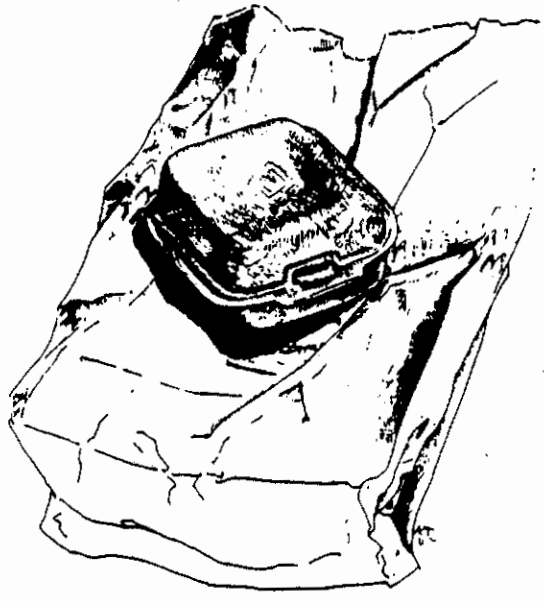
"We're going to be **real** popular after this one," Nightowl stated glumly. "I mean, we're used to this kind of stuff going on, but these kids..." He raised up his arms in helpless frustration.

"'What can't be cured must be endured,'" Buckaroo quoted, putting an arm around Nightowl's shoulders in comfort. Then, in an attempt to change the mood, he turned to Rawhide. "I'm starved, by the way. What's for breakfast?"

Rawhide grinned. "Like Egg McMuffins?"

Buckaroo made a face in reply. "Please spare me."

"Well, we made a call to Tonio, and he got a staff in early to accommodate us. And believe me, a couple hundred Egg McMuffins, hash browns, and biscuits is **some** accomodatin', y'know?"



"What are we going to do about other meals?" asked Nightowl as they headed to the field where Comanche had set up camp. Tables had been borrowed from the Park District, and at the moment, the Institute's culinary wizard was overseeing the installation of twenty-five barbecue grills, forty soda fountains, and thirty port-a-johns.

"We'll have to eat on shifts, time being," Rawhide answered. "Well, let's eat hardy, grab a cup of coffee and be off, huh?"

"About time you showed up," Little Red growled as Buckaroo strolled into the crowded infirmary. "There are some people here who'd like to get some sleep!"

"Take a few hours, Red," the Boss laconically replied.

"Okay, let me check on Tommy first. You coming?"

"Sure." As they headed for the ICU, Buckaroo scrutinized the patient's charts. "Stabilizing?"

"Some, but it's going to be touch and go for awhile. Midnite did pretty good, considering." She opened the door and moved to one side. Buckaroo gazed at the stricken fellow for some time; Tommy had casts on every limb, tubes running in and out of every orifice (and a few new ones), and was firmly held in traction. "He woke up a while ago, mumbled something odd, and passed out again."

"Might be for the best." Buckaroo flipped off his glasses and turned back to Red. "What did he say?"

"Something about...'Sasha', I think. Why? You think it may be a clue to what happened? I passed it on to Billy," she hurriedly added. "And we didn't find anything in his clothes pockets."

"Every clue helps. Okay, find your relief and get some sleep. I'll help out down here for awhile."

"Humph," Red grunted. "You doctors think just because you can open somebody up and play with his innards, you can do anything. Well, Doctor Banzai, while you're here, you will obey the orders of the Head Nurse. You shall not play God. This is **my** infirmary, got it?"

The renowned neurosurgeon gazed affectionately at the determined-looking redhead. "Got it, Boss."

"Damn straight," she muttered as she headed off towards the main station.

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By the end of the day, all of the apprentices and most of the interns had been quietly shipped out to various train, bus, and plane stations. Several of the interns, however, had defied the edict, declaring themselves able, ready and willing to defend the Institute against further attacks.

Nightowl and Mrs. Johnson managed to persuade the local university to lend them the use of a dormitory or two for those who stayed behind. Since classes were not in session, and since B. Banzai was on the Board of Regents (as well as a generous benefactor), the trustees nervously agreed, throwing in use of the food service facilities as well. Moving was accomplished swiftly and smoothly under the watchful eye of Rawhide and the communications skills of Big Norse.

There were only three patients in the Infirmary that required acute care; while Red was grudgingly willing to let Princess and Pecos go to the nearest hospital, she was adamantly against moving Tommy. And Rawhide objected strenuously about the security risks involved, so the three Cavaliers stayed put. Nightowl made arrangements with his sister in Boston to take care of his daughter and Johnny Nevada until conditions improved.

By the end of the day, Buckaroo was utterly exhausted. He would have continued working on getting things in order had it not been for Red slipping him a tranquilizer (under Rawhide's orders) when he wasn't looking. It was almost a relief to collapse into an empty Infirmary bed and sink into a deep, dreamless sleep.

After an eternity of darkness, Buckaroo sensed a presence in the room. He attempted to rise groggily from his bed, but found his body enveloped in an overwhelming lassitude. His nostrils inhaled a sweet, seductive perfume that dazzled every nerve ending. He sank back to the bed, lost in a hypnotic spell. It took every ounce of energy to speak: "W--who?"

"A friend, great Buckaroo Banzai," came a soft, melodic reply that soothed him. "A friend with a gift, one I bestow only upon my lovers. Would you be my lover, Buckaroo Banzai?"

His body surged in reply. "Yes," he moaned softly. "Oh, yes!"

"Very well, then," came the laughing music again. "Lie very still, and feel my kiss..." He felt the soft skin against his body, tasted her sweet lips as they teased his own, then felt her mouth move down to his neck...

There was a euphoric, agonizing explosion of pain and pleasure. Slowly the whiteness faded to warm, comforting blackness.

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Tommy moaned in his drugged dreams. "Sasha," he moaned to the empty room.

* * * * * * *

Red burst in on a "romantic interlude" between Reno and Pecos. "Reno--Buckaroo's missing!"

Instantly he was on his feet, gun in hand, looking alert if slightly rumpled. "When? Where's Rawhide? Did you check with Pinky?"

"I don't know how long he's been gone. Last time I checked on him was about two-three hours ago. I don't know where Rawhide is, and I only now discovered that he was gone!"

"Okay, get Pinky on the horn. I'll get Rawhide." He raced out of the room, leaving a concerned (and rather embarrassed) Pecos and a worried Red. The Infirmary's head nurse quickly reached Pinky on the Go-phone and filled him in on the situation; Rawhide, who'd been on duty with him, raced to the Infirmary.

Reno was scrutinizing Buckaroo's room when Rawhide came in. "I don't like the look of this," he muttered.

"No kiddin'?"

"I'm serious. Check the pillow." Rawhide paled slightly at the sight of dried blood. Not much, admittedly, but it implied many things, none of them good.

"Well, we didn't see anyone come in tonight, and we got guards posted everywhere." Rawhide leaned against the wall and nibbled on his thumb. "You sure he didn't just get a hankerin' and take off, Red?"

"Positive, cowboy. No one can get in or out of here without going past the desk. And either Suzy or myself was there at all times."

"You check with Mrs. Johnson?" Reno suddenly asked.

"Uh...yeah. She said he wasn't there, either," Red blushed.

"Damn! He's making us look like monkeys!" Reno slammed a fist into the bed. "What do we do, Rawhide?"

"We send out additional messages to the Blue Blazes Billy's got out. And we wait. Xan wouldn't hurt Buck just yet. He'd want us to be there so as to get a good reaction out of it. So let's just play it safe for now."

"I don't like this," Reno repeated.

"Neither do I. But the ball's in his court now."

* * * * * * *

"You have him? Intact?"

Sasha slid up to her master's throne, her slave beside her. "Yes, my lord. But I hunger!"

"Let me see him." A strong, curiously gentle hand beckoned Buckaroo forward. Gazing dreamily at everything and nothing, he obeyed the summons. "Very good," came the voice seconds later. "Not very damaged. You've done well, my dear."

"Thank you, my lord." She fell to her knees in supplication. "And now, my Lord Xan, may I go and feed? The hunger, it burns within me!"

A low, malicious chuckled drifted towards her. "Very well. Do not drink too deeply,

my lovely Sasha. Our foes will draw nigh tomorrow night. I will need my beautiful angel at my side."

"As always, I am yours to command." Sasha bowed, then gracefully walked away, licking her lips in sensual anticipation of the game to be found tonight.

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"We found Tommy's car," Billy announced wearily to the assembled Cavaliers. "Or at least what was left of it."

"Xan get even that?" Nightowl asked.

"Nah--neighborhood gangs. They'll strip anything that remains stationary for very long. But it was about five blocks from "Tala's", near the Walsh Complex. Nothing in it to indicate any trouble."

"Well, least we got a fix. Checkin' with the help?"

"Yeah." Billy rubbed his neck tiredly; his girlfriend P.C. came over without a word and set to work on his shoulders. "A few of 'em remember Tommy coming in and staying awhile, then taking off in a hurry with some exotic knockout. Apparently, she'd been cruising around with a few guys till Tommy showed, then she took almost exclusive rights to him."

"Get a make?" Rio asked, pencil at the ready.

"That's the strange thing. You press 'em for a description, and they can't seem to recall much about her, only that she was sexy as hell and dressed in some sort of multi-colored dress. Same story all around."

"Rio, take an identikit and two Irregulars, try to do better than that," Rawhide ordered. "Anything about the Boss?"

"Don't need to go any further," Nightowl piped up from nearby. He had the Daily News want ads spread out. "Jeez, talk about 'come into my parlor'!"

"Let's hear it."

"Okay. Lessee...'Looking for that special someone? Search no more--we've got what you're looking for. Come and get it if you've courage and daring enough.' Lists a phone number to call."

"Awright, give it a try, Owl, see if we can run a trace. I doubt you will, but let's try. Xan'll make it difficult, but not too difficult. He wants us to find him."

"Righto." Nightowl folded up the paper with the ad face up. "Wish Tommy was up for this one--we could use him."

"I know." Rawhide slouched into his chair in glum anticipation. "We've been pawns in this damn game of Xan's--it's Buckaroo he's after, and he's usin' us all to get at him. First Tommy, then the Institute and the other incidents. Who knows what else he'll come up with?"

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There was darkness all around him, choking and pressing against his very skin. The air was moist and stifling; it must be daylight somewhere nearby. Buckaroo Banzai struggled to gather his thoughts into a logical order, wondering why it was so very difficult to do so. His mental confusion was like a thick blanket around his brain.

He lay on a dusty wooden bench of some sort. His nose itched furiously; with a long sneeze, he cleared his lungs of the irritation. He peered through the overwhelming gloom of the chamber--it felt far too large to be a mere room. Shapes of various sizes could barely be made out, but not so much as to permit identification. Cautiously, aware of unseen eyes watching his every move, Buckaroo rose to his feet and steadied himself. Why was his body feeling so out of sorts?

His mind was still awhirl and unable to settle down; this was quite unlike him, yet he couldn't make sense of everything. Even his memories were jumbled and drifting. What was dream and what was reality?

There was something just ahead, something that sat near the front of the chamber. It was rather large...Buckaroo suddenly realized that he was standing in an aisle; that meant theatre, church, auditorium...

Why was it so damned dark?

Stumbling, lurching awkwardly, Buckaroo finally made it to the large object. It was some sort of marble table, from the feel of it. And something lay very still upon it...

Light exploded from above; Buckaroo cried out and fell backwards under the blinding assault. He curled up into a ball and groaned, shielding his eyes against the overwhelming illumination. He only vaguely heard the familiar laughter dancing around the empty chamber. Seconds later, the lights dimmed to a more tolerable level.

Slowly, with a hand over his throbbing eyes, Buckaroo turned towards the marble table. It wasn't a something...it was a someone. She lay there peacefully, eyes closed and arms folded in eternal sleep. She looked almost as still as the table she lay upon, white, pale stone forever still.

A memory crept through the haze of his mind, something that flitted through his thoughts and filled him with an odd comfort. Her black hair, the perfectly-sculpted body. Sasha slept for now. He would sleep too, then. And when she woke, she would speak kindly

to him, give him what he so desperately craved, her lovely kiss that mixed pleasure and pain so very well.

Sighing softly, Buckaroo curled up beside the table and fell into a dreamless sleep.

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"Good news and bad news," Dallas announced to Rawhide.

"Couldn't trace the call," Rawhide guessed, sipping his coffee and moving away from the inventory listings. Mrs. Johnson sat nearby, buried in paperwork but hanging on to every word.

"Yep, but we did get something we could trace." Dallas handed him a slip of paper. "Post Office Box. FDR Station."

"Let's get someone down there."

"Too late," Dallas grinned. "Nightowl grabbed the Escort and was on his way."

Just then, Rio came in. "I gave it my best shot," she sighed as she tossed her pad and drawing materials onto the table. "But...nothing. Billy had it straight on. Nobody remembers details, only general appearance." She flopped down into a chair and gazed hungrily at the basket of fruit on the table. "Is that for anyone?"

"Yep," Rawhide drawled, tossing her an apple and orange. "Okay. Dallas, make sure Owl doesn't do something stupid like play hero. He's to observe and follow only. When he gets a fix, he lets us know and waits. You make damn sure he **waits**, got me?"

"Okay," the black man grinned. "I'll keep an eye on him."

"Great," Rawhide growled. "Like sending a mouse to guard my cheese."

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"I love playing stakeout," Nightowl commented. He stood casually in the midst of the FDR Postal Station, Ray-bans slid on his nose with careless style and hands shoved insolently in his leather aviator's jacket. His eyes never strayed far from a small postal box on the opposite wall.

"Obviously," Dallas grinned as he spoke into the Go-phone. He was dressed precisely in carefully-tailored three-piece suit, standing in the express service line. "We make quite a pair, huh? Kinda like Crockett and Tubbs, huh? You tryin' to look like George Michael there, Owl? Or does Princess have to remind you to shave in the morning?"

"Har-de-har-har," came the tart reply. "Some of us...hold on, might have something here."

A smallish fellow was walking furtively around, glancing about every now and then. He was decked in trenchcoat and wide brimmed hat. "What you thinkin'?" Dallas whispered.

"Either he's our man or he's got a **very** guilty conscience," Nightowl replied. "Ahh...heading for the box, there's a good fellow." Sure enough, the little man crept over to where the mysterious post office box sat...and opened the door three levels below the one they were staking out.

"I'd nail him on general principle," Nightowl frumped.

"Take it **easy**, Owl."

"Shoot, that's the third one today, Dallas, and sure as sin they're all up to various levels of no good...maybe there's something to vigilante justice, you know?"

"Eyes up," Dallas muttered softly. A tall, handsome fellow was now opening the box in question and flipping through the contents. "Make him?"

"Well, hush my mouth and call me a Yankee fan," Nightowl drawled. "That there be Lucas Harnell, star of the Hanoi Xan legal eagle team."

"Hmmm. Follow him?"

"Why not? No, wait. You stay here and keep an eye on things, just in case they're pulling a fast one. I'll tail him." As the well-dressed lawyer turned to leave through the revolving doors, Nightowl stretched lazily and headed off in hot, casual pursuit.

Dallas had finally reached the window. "Please send these first class," he politely requested, handing over several packages Mrs. Johnson had given him. Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed another visitor to the box, this one nowhere near as finely dressed as Harnell. In fact, the guy was strictly street people. Dallas paid the postage and hurried to the door as the raggedy fellow headed into the streets. He hoped that between himself and Nightowl, they might succeed in tracking their Boss down.

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"Mr....Nightowl, isn't it?" Lucas Harnell lit a cigarette and stared disdainfully at the Cavalier, who was pinned by two bodyguards quite securely. "Should you wish to speak to me about anything, my telephone number is listed in the Yellow Pages. You need only call for an appointment, not resort to such childish, foolish stunts."

"You know damn well why I was tailing you," Nightowl snapped, regretting it immediately when the thug to his left twisted his arm up behind him. "Xan is here in New York, he's got Buckaroo."

"Really now? I really would wish that you and your comrades would bother to take lessons in ethics. Were you to do so, you would know that I cannot betray my client's

confidentiality." Harnell took a long draw from his cigarette. "I have no idea where Xan is at the moment. He hardly contacts me whenever he chooses to travel. So your puerile actions are a waste of your time and mine."

"What should we do with him?" asked the hoodlum on the right.

"Hmm. Indeed." Harnell considered the possibilities. "While an object lesson would no doubt serve to remind Nightowl that I prefer to be left alone, this might cause legal problems later on. No, simply escort him down the stairs and let him go."

"Okay." The two guards tossed Nightowl to the staircase door, then proceeded to "aid" him down five flights of stairs. Rather battered and the worse for wear, he staggered out of the World Trade Center and activated his Go-phone. "Hey...Dallas, you..on?"

"You okay, Owl?"

"Ahhh...no." He slumped against the wall, hoping that the local police wouldn't pick him up on vagrancy charges; he had no great desire to visit Bellevue. "Harnell came up blank. How about you?"

"Zip. The guy I was tailing went straight to the nearest bar, then to the nearest gutter. Where are you? I'll pick you up."

"World Trade Center. Hurry, okay? I feel awful."

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"You look awful, Nightowl," Mrs. Johnson commented as he and Dallas walked into the temporary command center.

"You should have seen the other truck." Nightowl flopped into the closest chair. "Struck out, Rawhide. I think it's another of Xan's games, and we fell for it."

"S'okay." Rawhide slapped a small pile of papers. "Billy got into Harnell's computer records, and from there, he went digging and found every piece of property Xan owns. We been checkin' those out while you were out playin' 'Miami Vice'."

"Ho ho ho," Dallas growled in their defense. "What have you got?"

"You can safely rule most of these out," Mrs. Johnson explained. "Public places, office buildings, that sort of thing. Xan even has a percentage of the Empire State Building, did you know? Anyway, there are three sites so far that we think might serve Xan's purposes."

"Tell us more," Nightowl sighed; Little Red had apparently heard from the scuttlebutt about him, and was busy patching up various cuts and bruises.

"First one is an abandoned factory on Long Island Sound; Pinky's checking that one out. Second we have a church in Brooklyn up for demolition, and Rover's headed that way. Third is, believe it or not, Yankee Stadium."

"Thought that qualified as 'public place'," Dallas commented.

"Not at this time," Nightowl corrected. "Off-season, that place is shut up tight as a...hey! Easy with that stuff, Red!"

"Shut up," the nurse growled. "You're lucky they didn't work you over more, Owl. Your wife is going to kill us both if she sees this."

"Anyway," Mrs. Johnson continued, "we've got the stadium covered by Annie O. Now it's just a matter of waiting to hear if we strike paydirt..."

"Or strike out again," Rawhide finished.

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Night was falling over New Jersey before the reports started coming in. Annie O had gone through considerable effort and frustration before being allowed to search the stadium with a few Blue Blazes, but had found nothing. Pinky was similarly unsuccessful at the Long Island warehouse. Nothing had been received from Rover.

"Don't like it," Rawhide shook his head. "Rover knows the rules, and we ain't gotten a transmit from his Go-phone for three hours."

"That's one way to bag a confirm," Reno commented sardonically. "We gonna check it out?"

"If we go out there full force and it turns out to be nothing, we're gonna look awful dumb."

"If we don't go," Mrs. Johnson retorted, "Buckaroo might die."

Five minutes later, six Cavaliers (Rawhide, Reno, New Jersey, Annie O, Flo Nightingale, and Mrs. Johnson) and one intern (Rio) headed off for the Our Lady of Perpetual Sorrow, located on East 18th Street in Brooklyn. Nightowl and a few others stayed behind to guard the remains of the grounds.

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Buckaroo sensed her presence before he opened his eyes. "Waken, my love," she soothed him. "The time grows near...my enemies approach to destroy us. I need your help."

"I'll defend you to the death," he assured her fervently.

"And my master, too," she smiled. "Lord Xan requires your utmost loyalty as well."

"Of..course," he nodded. "Anything for you, Sasha."

"Then let us prepare for our visitors," she smiled. Sasha was feeling quite sated at the moment; the intruder she'd found outside had been just what she'd needed.

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The odd thing about New York was the churches; you could walk down any street and right in the middle of all these modern skyscrapers would be a small cathedral, looking out of place and quite content all at once. Of course, since the churches had been there first, the argument could be made that the skyscrapers were in fact the interlopers, but over the years, developers took great pains (financially) to purchase the land on which the churches sat and redevelop it.

Our Lady of Perpetual Sorrows was quite run-down; no one had come to worship there since the parish had built a better, more modern church not far away. The lovely, ancient stained-glass windows were rock-riddled; the solid stone walls were stained with the ages of pollution and abuse New York had thrown upon it. The grass was tall and unkempt—in fact, you could easily hide a body in it. Which was where the Cavaliers found Rover.

"Still alive, but barely," New Jersey reported. "I'll get him to a hospital."

"Want me to come with?" Flo asked.

"No—Buckaroo or someone might need help before all's said and done," the lanky Cavalier grinned. "Just help me get him to the car, and I'll be off."

"Leaves us the van to high-tail it outta here in case we need a getaway," Rawhide mused as he watched the car pull away.

"No one's coming out of this one till one side's dead," Reno promised.

"What do we do? Play it sneaky or waltz right in?" Mrs. Johnson asked. She carried Pecos' throwing knives around her belt.

"Hell, Xan knows we're here, so we might as well go in and duke it out." Rawhide stepped up to the door and slammed a big, meaty hand against it; the wood splintered and gave way. "Abandon hope, y'all."

The ancient wood floorboards creaked in warning as the rescuers cautiously made their way into the decrepit building. The air was dank and hinted of rot somewhere hidden away. Rawhide slowly picked a path to the main sanctuary, followed closely by the others. Their weapons were gripped firmly with the knowledge they'd soon be used.

There was but a single light in the large, airy main room; it poured down upon the altar in melodramatic style. Behind the altar stood two chairs, and in one sat Buckaroo Banzai. He was dressed in a flowing black kimono, and upon his lap sat a gleaming samurai sword with odd runes etched upon its blade. In the other chair sat a tall, mesmerizing woman, who smiled with sensual anticipation at her visitors. She looked as if every gesture could drive a man wild with desire.

"Welcome, all of you," she spoke in silken tones. "My love and I have been expecting you for some time now. Do come in."

Rawhide stepped forward, followed quickly by the other men; the women were slightly jostled but attributed their comrades' rudeness to the tension of the moment. "Is he all right?" Mrs. Johnson whispered, referring to Buckaroo.

"He is fine, I assure you," the woman laughed, her husky tones drifting languidly across the dusty air. "Are you not, my love?"

"I am well, Sasha." The words were flat, expressionless, as was his gaze upon his allies.

"Well, since we are all gathered," Sasha continued as she poured out of her seat to her feet, "gentlemen, you will do me the kindness of killing the women, then yourselves."

Mrs. Johnson and the others froze momentarily as Reno and Rawhide turned towards them, their eyes blank but their expressions murderous. "We've been had," Flo gasped.

"Scatter!" Mrs. Johnson screamed as Buckaroo lunged forward, blade in hand. Sasha smiled and leapt into the air, flying gracefully into the melee as well.

Rawhide slammed his fist into Flo's face; the black nurse cried out and tumbled backwards. Instinctively she lifted her gun towards her attacker, then realized what she'd almost done. Instantly she recognized the delicious irony of her situation: the women couldn't seriously injure the men, but they had no such compunctions towards them.

Mrs. Johnson felt the rush of breeze as a sword swished just over her head. "Just my luck," she grumbled as her hands darted for a throwing knife. Before she could pull one off her belt, however, Buckaroo slammed his body into hers, sending her reeling to the floor and knocking the breath out of her body with a harsh whoosh. Dazed, she struggled to move but could only lie there under his cruel smile.

Annie O actually fired a shot at Reno, but she was too rattled to aim correctly. He grabbed her arm and twisted it savagely, smiling at the sound of breaking bones and her scream of anguish. He lunged for her throat, intentions plain, but Annie eluded his move and slammed her knee into his chest. He tumbled to the floor but was up again in an instant. She ran towards the front of the sanctuary, knowing he was right behind her.

Rio lifted her weapon of choice, a miniature crossbow with steel-tipped arrows, and fired at the descending Sasha. The arrow slammed into her chest and imbedded itself deeply, but the woman laughed harshly and pulled it out again. She then grabbed Rio and threw her across the room; the girl smashed into the communion railing, sending wooden splinters flying. Sasha licked her lips in anticipation and ascended again for her prey.

Mrs. Johnson blinked her eyes in panic, trying to regain control of her body. Buckaroo stood over her, grinning nastily as he lifted the sword over his head for the death blow. Summoning every ounce of strength, she slammed her foot as hard as she could into his most vulnerable area. His eyes widened in surprise, then cringed in agony; she scrambled out of the way as he crumpled to the floor and curled up in fetal position. Mrs. Johnson wasted no time in consolation, but grabbed the samurai sword and raced for the front of the church.

Rawhide threw another punch at Flo; she twisted, grabbed his arm, and neatly tossed him into the plaster wall. With a loud grunt, he pulled himself out of the newly-created hole and came at her again. She stepped to one side and quickly karate chopped his shoulder hard. Rawhide bellowed in pain and crashed into a row of pews, then quickly rose to his feet again and charged.

Annie O scrambled desperately away from a rapidly-nearing Reno, throwing any piece of debris she could find at him. All it seemed to do was spur him on. Finally, she stumbled and fell backwards, screaming as she came down on her injured arm. Reno smiled savagely and closed in; Annie frantically patted the area immediately around her and found an empty liquor bottle. She grasped it tightly and slammed it against the floor, feeling it shatter with a satisfying tinkle. The mesmerized Cavalier paused as he found the jagged edges of the bottle waving before him.

Rio struggled to clear her head; Sasha landed nearby, her long white canines gleaming in the wildly swaying light. Thinking quickly, the lithe intern fumbled for two splintered fragments of wood, then held them before her in the shape of a cross.

Sasha laughed harshly at the pathetic display. "Foolish child, that does me no harm whatsoever." With contemptuous ease she smacked Rio's hands, sending the makeshift cross flying away. "Nothing can stop me from killing you, nothing at all..."

Mrs. Johnson lunged wildly at Sasha, samurai sword whistling through the air. "Guess again!"

There was a momentary resistance, then a wet thud as Sasha's head tumbled free from her body.

The entranced Cavaliers paused in their relentless attack.

Buckaroo Banzai gripped his head in his hands and screamed.

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"CODE BLUE!" Little Red screamed down the hall.

Midnite and Suzy Q raced down the corridor, crash cart flying between them as they careened into Tommy's Room. "What happened?" asked the doctor as he prepared his patient.

"No idea," Red gasped as she assisted. "He was fine one second, then screamed bloody murder and flatlined the next." She prepared a shot of adrenaline. "Can't thump him, Midnite, not with those ribs."

"Give him a shot direct, I'll prep him for electroshock." Red fired off the syringe right on target, then cleared the region as Midnite swabbed the dying Cavalier's chest. "All right, clear!"

The pads touched Tommy's chest and released their powerful load; his body jerked in response.

"No go, still flat," Suzy reported.

"Clear," Midnite growled.

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"Would someone mind telling me just what the hell is going on?" Rawhide growled in bewilderment. Flo eyed him warily, assuming the standard defense position.

"Yeah," Reno shook his head. "I remember coming in here, then...?"

"Help me up," Annie O ordered. "And easy, big fella. You broke my arm."

"I did?" Reno looked utterly mystified, then gulped at the sight of Sasha's body and head. "Huh?"

Mrs. Johnson leaned heavily against the altar, giving in to nausea. "Long story," Rio shushed them. "Let's get Buckaroo and get the hell out of here, okay?"

"Good idea," Rawhide nodded, scooping up the unconscious Buckaroo and slinging him over one shoulder. "If this was some game of Xan's, odds are the place is booby trapped."

They raced out of the building; two minutes later, a series of explosions razed the ancient church to ashes. By the time the fire department arrived, the building was a complete loss. No witnesses were ever located, and the official record was closed as an unsolved arson.

Inside the van, Buckaroo slowly regained consciousness. "What..." he asked groggily from where his head lay on Mrs. Johnson's lap.

"Long story, Buck," she soothed him. "Just rest. It's all over."

"Never over," he mumbled softly. "Never..." And then he sank back into a deep, dreamless sleep. The van raced on towards New Brunswick...and home.

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"How is he doing?" a rested Buckaroo Banzai asked Little Red as they left Perfect Tommy's room. The injured Cavalier was resting peacefully after his seizure.

"He'll be okay, Midnite thinks," the nurse sighed. "Rough time for awhile, but ol' Cocky here pulled him through. Man does not know when to give up." Midnite grinned tiredly, but his eyes shone with pride.

"Rest," Buckaroo echoed. "He'll have plenty of time for that, at least. More than the rest of us." He paused at the door to the next room, where Rover lay amid a maze of tubes and monitor hookups. "I'm glad we got him here in time."

"Yeah," New Jersey smiled tiredly. "Broke several traffic laws doing it, but that was the easy part. Replacing that A negative blood of his was next to impossible. Give him a week or so, and he'll be back on his feet."

"That stuff you told us about Sasha was real weird," Red commented as they headed for the Infirmary office. "Did you really feel her death throes?"

"In a manner of speaking," Buckaroo nodded. "Her victims must have had some sort of psychic linkup with her, perhaps to make them even more compliant. Judging from the time of Tommy's seizure, he apparently was still in contact with her up to the end."

"We had some trouble with Rover around then, too, but not as bad," New Jersey informed him.

Buckaroo nodded with a smile, then turned to gaze at a suddenly-shy Rio. "I understand you volunteered for that rescue mission."

"Well..." she shrugged in embarrassment.

"Ever want to become a Cavalier?" Buckaroo asked with that inscrutable expression, but his eyes danced with amusement.

Rio gasped. "Only all my life," she finally replied.

Buckaroo's face broke into a grin. "Well then, I guess we'd better not waste any more time, had we? Welcome aboard, Rio." He offered his hand to her, and with her acceptance, a new Cavalier was born. The others, who stood or sat around the cramped Infirmary office, broke into applause.

Rawhide yawned loudly, then sobered momentarily. "Don't seem right, Boss. Xan got us but good this time, and looks like we never got even. Ain't right for the good guys to not finish on top."

"Sometimes, my friends," Buckaroo nodded somberly, "just surviving is victory enough. We took the worst he had to throw at us, and we're still alive. I'll settle for that...for now."

"Well, it wasn't a complete loss," Rawhide conceded with a yawn. "We did get this." He offered the samurai sword to Buckaroo, who studied the markings on the blade carefully. To everyone's surprise, he broke into a fit of chuckling.

"You're right, Rawhide, it's not a complete loss. This is Xan's ancestral sword. Priceless, no doubt, at least to him. He must have thought it some sort of cosmic irony, giving it to me to destroy you." He gazed at Annie O's arm cast, then at the various

welts, cuts, and bruises on the remainder of the rescue squad. "I'm just sorry we came out of this so banged up."

"I'm just sorry Xan wasn't there for the big finale," Reno growled under his breath.

"Another day, another time," Buckaroo assured him.

"Hey, I got a question," Flo piped up. "Why didn't you guys just shoot us when Sasha told you to kill us?"

"She just said to kill you," Reno grinned. "She didn't say how."

"I had to ask," Flo rolled her eyes heavenward.

Mrs. Johnson slipped a tired arm around Buckaroo's waist. "What do we do now, Boss?" she asked with a touch of weariness.

He gazed at her fondly, then looked out the window; the night's black cloak was lightening to shades of violet. "We rebuild," he finally spoke. "We learn our lesson and make it tougher for this to happen again. We come back from the ashes that much wiser, and that much stronger. And we stand firm for the light against the darkness."

"But first," Red grinned, "we all get some sleep!"

Their laughter filled the room as the first rays of dawn crept over the horizon.

THE BANZAI INSTITUTE SONG
by Lisa Savignano

Stone are my walls and my roof is of timber
but the hands of my builder are stronger by far
The roof may be burned and my stones may be scattered
But never our light be defeated by war.

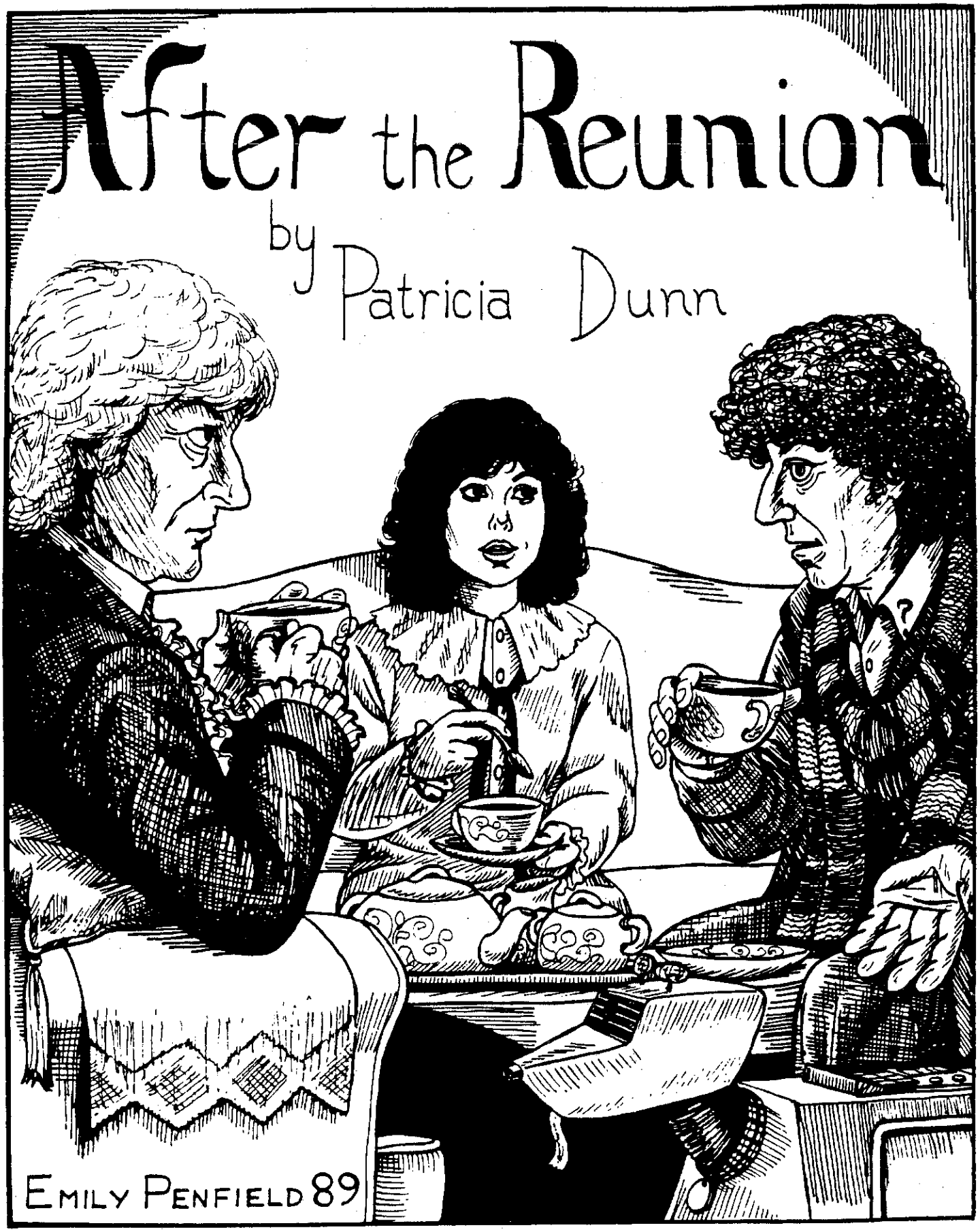
We are the heart and the youth of our country
Many discovr'ries by us were made
Many the years have gone by since its building
With all of our knowledge, still love is our aid.

Long is the work, and yet it's unfinished
From all our world's cities and countries so wide
The knowledge we spread is to better all living
What we have learned is our work is our pride.

Blood paid the price of the lands that we live on
Yes, blood is the price that we sometimes must pay.
We carry on, strong still in spite of this burden:
Violence for others, but peace is our way.

We are the heart and the soul of the country
One man's love built us, and so we remain
A home for the heart of all who may leave us
And a beacon for faring their way home again.

Stone are my walls, and my roof is of timber,
but the hearts of the friends here are stronger by far
The roof may be burned and her stones may be scattered,
but never our light be defeated at all.


After the Reunion
by Patricia Dunn
Emily Penfield 89

Sarah followed the third Doctor into the TARDIS, glanced around in surprise. "It's empty!"

"Certainly." he said, closing the door.

"But... the others - didn't they go in HERE too, just now?"

"Not quite," he said, smiling at her from his place by the console. "They went into their own TARDISes - we're in OURS. Relative dimensions, remember. We'll all leave separately, though one TARDIS will stay behind."

Sarah thought that over, shook her head. "Is that possible?"

"On Gallifrey - with the intervention of Rassilon - anything is possible." he reached for the dematerialization control.

"Wait!" Sarah said, laying a hand on his arm. "I just remembered - what about Bessie?"

He paused, frowning. "Can't have Edwardian roadsters cluttering up Gallifrey... I wonder - just take a peek through there, would you?" he gestured at the door which led to the interior of the TARDIS.

Sarah nodded, ran to the door and opened it, looked beyond it. A moment later, she turned and exclaimed, "It's here, Doctor! Parked in the corridor!"

"Ah," he said with satisfaction, "I thought so. Lord Rassilon always had a reputation for tidiness." He activated the time rotor.

Sarah sighed, thinking of the chain of mysterious events within the Death Zone which had culminated in the reunion they had just left. "I must say I like that, Doctor: I get kidnapped from Earth, nearly fall off a cliff, get waylaid by some old school chum of yours who's turned out bad, follow you into an ambush by a blind-attack robot, almost get caught in the cross-fire from some Cybermen, have to practically fly across a mountain in order to get into something called the Dark Tower, traipse through MILES of corridors, with you wandering off and having hallucinations - and what happens when we finally end up where we're going?"

"Er - what, Sarah?"

She threw up her hands. "I barely have time to say hello to the Brigadier, and to start sorting out which of you is you... when some robed idiot materializes out of nowhere and casts a spell on us all, so we have to stand by without moving or speaking!"

The white haired Doctor said solemnly, "Yes, Sarah Jane, I can quite understand why the latter situation would be intolerable to you."

Sarah glared at him, detected the twinkle in his blue eyes, and finally joined in his laughter. "I think that girl called Tegan hated it even worse than I did... Anyway," she finished with relief, "at least it's all over."

"Quite right, and I will have you home in no time."

'If you were someone else, I wouldn't believe that for a minute,' Sarah thought to herself with a smile. 'I'm not sure I believe YOU, even...' Aloud, she said, "What did you think about him - the one in the cricket whites?"

"Five?" queried the Doctor. "He'll do, I suppose. Looks much too young, of course. He'll never be properly respected with THAT face. Still, I expect he's better than old Scarecrow... Or even that other chap, the one you're so fond of, hm?" he glanced at her and smiled.

'Yes,' she thought, 'I AM fond of him...' "I wonder what happened to him," she mused. "It's not like him to miss out on the fun like this."

The third Doctor shrugged. "No choice in the matter, I'm afraid. From what I heard, Borusa's timescoop hadn't the power to draw him all the way through the Vortex to Gallifrey. Still, you needn't worry - Lord Rassilon took care of that problem as well."

"I guess so," Sarah sighed. Realizing that her melancholy might be construed as insulting to her companion, she straightened her shoulders and said cheerily, "Well, I wish Lord Rassilon hadn't been in such a hurry to rush everyone off like that. We could have had a REAL reunion party!"

"The whole thing had gone on quite long enough, thank you," the Doctor sniffed. "Two reunions in the same century are sufficient for me!"

Sarah was about to ask him what he meant, when the TARDIS gave a jolt. The time rotor slowed to a stop, signaling materialization.

"South Croydon, I believe," the Doctor said, opening the viewscreen. "1983?"

"Yes, of course!" Sarah said, recognizing her won neighborhood. "However did you do it?"

The Doctor drew himself up. "Talent, skill, a fine hand on the navigation instruments-"

"And luck!" a voice said from the doorway.

Sarah whirled, stared at the familiar scarfed figure who stood there.

"Good grief," the third Doctor said, looking him up and down. "I really AM all teeth and curls!"

"It's so nice to met me again, too," the fourth Doctor retorted. "Hullo, Sarah Jane Smith." He smiled and tipped his hat towards her in salutation.

She blinked and looked at him more closely. He was wearing a slightly different outfit , and his long scarf was all in shades of red, but it was undeniably the Doctor. She looked form him to the elegantly dressed figure beside her, and resisted the urge to swoon gracefully to the floor.

After all, she told herself, having to deal with TWO Doctors at the same time should be only half as confusing as having FOUR of them around...

"Oh, Doctor," she said in exasperation, smiling despite herself, "what are YOU doing here?"

"Excellent question," the Third remarked. "What, indeed?"

"Well, I saw the TARDIS pop in from across the street," the Fourth answered, "from Sarah's

living room window, actually, and I thought I'd better - This is really rather a long story... Would anyone care for a jelly baby?" He held out the familiar white paper bag.

"Never mind the jelly babies," the Third commanded, " get on with the explanation."

Sarah took an orange colored sweet, then paused. "Wait a minute - why were you in my house, Doctor?"

"I'd come to see you, of course," he told her. "You were out, but I used the sonic screwdriver on the front door's lock and let myself in." He looked vaguely apologetic. "I thought I could wait till you got home, and in the meantime talk to K9 about my problem -"

"Some problem," Sarah laughed, "breaking and entering! It's all right, though, Doctor - I forgive you."

"And I forgive you, too, Sarah," he said, cheerfully selecting a jelly baby of his own and munching away on it.

"Me - what for?"

He spread his hands. "Why, for giving me all this worry! K9 told me you were walking to work, since the car was being repaired. Said he'd warned you of some sort of danger, but you were in a hurry and sent him back home."

"That's right," she said. "I remember - and the next thing I knew I was on Gallifrey, in the Death Zone."

The fourth Doctor stared. "You - what?!"

"Well, that IS a long story," the Third told him. Should I fill you in?"

The Fourth nodded. "Ready for contact?"

"Ready," his predecessor answered. A look passed between them, then each shut his eyes and remained standing still for several seconds. Finally the two Doctors opened their eyes and exchanged comprehending glances.

"That's all." the Third said.

"Hm," the Fourth mused. "I see... Yes, that explains the temporal-spatial anomaly K9 had scanned. Must have been the timescoop's vortex ... Anyway, I ran off to see if I could find Sarah, following the path K9 said she'd taken."

"Only I wasn't there." Sarah guessed.

"No, you weren't." he confirmed. "I must have been too late. You weren't at your office, either, or at your first interview appointment, which is when I really started to worry..."

'Poor Doctor,' Sarah thought, 'he stopped by for a visit and it turned all topsy-turvey on him.' "It's all right," she reassured him. "I'm fine, really."

"I can see that." he nodded, looking down at her. He glanced at the third Doctor. "The Death Zone, though - you're very lucky, both of you."

"Luck had nothing to do with it," the Third said. "Thank you, however, that clears it all up... except for one thing: What, may I ask, is a K9?"

"Come on in, and I'll show you." Sarah exclaimed. "You'll like him, Doctor." She turned to the Fourth with, "And YOU can finish discussing whatever it was with him, Doctor... And I'll put the kettle on and we can have our own little reunion party!"

The Doctors exchanged glances, and made some feeble protests, but both soon gave in before her vigorous insistence.

A few minutes later, Sarah was bustling cheerfully about in her kitchen, occasionally taking a peek out at her tow guests in the living room. K9 was keeping them entertained while she saw to the making of tea.

The third Doctor was eyeing K9 III with a mixture of amusement and curiosity, while the Fourth conferred with the computer-dog, feeding him a list of numbers and other data. After a while, K9 spat out a strip of readout from his muzzle.

The fourth Doctor tore it off and looked at it. "Is this correct, K9?"

"Affirmative, Master." the robot dog replied. "Assuming the data you have given me is correct."

The third Doctor chuckled, looked up as Sarah entered with the tea-tray. "Remarkable little fellow."

"Well, he's an excellent watch dog." she agreed. "I never had a chance to properly thank you for sending him to me, Doctor."

The fourth Doctor was frowning at the readout strip, finally gave up and stuffed it in his waistcoat pocket. "Hm? Oh, no need for that, Sarah. Sorry to be bothering you like this, but my own model got left behind in E-Space..." He accepted the cup of tea she offered him, and reached for the sugar bowl.

"Just what is this mysterious project of yours, anyway?" asked the Third, adding extra cream to his tea.

The curly-haired Doctor cleared his throat. "Oh, well, you know the chameleon circuit's been broken for centuries..."

"You're not thinking of repairing it at last?" the Third asked, with a raised eyebrow.

"And why not?!" the Fourth demanded. "Might be useful."

Sarah stirred her cup of tea, stared at it thoughtfully. "I don't know, Doctor...I always liked the old police box disguise. Made it so easy to find!"

They laughed, and Sarah went on, "You know, I saw a real police box not long ago. I was driving down the Barnett bypass, enroute to an assignment, and there it was by the roadside. Nearly caused me to have an accident, because I thought it might be the TARDIS...But it was just a call box, of course."

No one said anything for a minute, them the fourth Doctor changed the subject. "So you ran

into the Master on Gallifrey, did you? I've had a recent encounter or two with him, myself. Can't say he's learned any manners."

They chatted on, and the fourth Doctor told them of his search for the Key to Time and of his adventures in E-Space. Then Sarah and the Third told him in more detail about their adventure in the Death Zone.

"Sorry I missed out on it." the Fourth said at last.

"I'm not." the third Doctor snapped. "Although you WERE a bit of a nuisance, anyway - floating about in the Vortex and endangering the rest of us..."

"How do you suppose I felt?" asked the Fourth indignantly.

"Don't be absurd, you didn't feel anything at all. Did you?"

The fourth Doctor considered. "No." he admitted. "Or at least I don't remember. But look here, I WOULD have felt very badly about it - if I'd known about it, I mean."

Sarah had her hand over her mouth, trying hard not to laugh. As it was, a muffled giggle escaped her lips.

Both Doctors looked at her, and she felt the laughter welling up with redoubled force. "Sorry," she gasped. "I'm..." she shook her head helplessly.

"Sarah, you really must try to be less serious about things." the fourth Doctor admonished with a grin.

"I fail to see what is so funny." the Third remarked. "Unless it's HIM, of course."

The Fourth stopped grinning, glared. "And what's THAT supposed to-"

"Never mind, Doctor." Sarah interrupted. "No need to fight among yourself." She burst out laughing again.

"Mistress, are you all right?" asked K9 III.

She controlled herself. "Oh, K9 - I'm fine!" She patted the mechanical dog's head, looked at her guests. "It's just that I'm so pleased to see you, Doctor - BOTH of you."

"And it's been delightful seeing you again, Sarah." the third Doctor said, rising to his feet. "I'm afraid I really must be going now, though. I've a little jaunt planned to Metebelis Three."

Sarah, sobered, exchanged startled glances with the fourth Doctor.

"You don't say." the latter remarked. "Why?"

"Oh, I just want to pick up a little wedding present for a friend of mine." the Third answered. "Know just the thing, too... Goodbye, Sarah Jane. As for you," he added, looking his successor up and down. "I suppose we'll be meeting again?"

"Possibly sooner than you think." the Fourth agreed, rather cryptically.

"But, Doctor," Sarah began, as he went into her foyer to retrieve his plaid driving coat from her hatrack, "you can't - " She stopped as the fourth Doctor touched her arm and shook his head.

"No, Sarah. Don't say anything." He whispered.

"But that's how it all began, wasn't it - with the blue crystal from Metebilis Three, and the spiders..."

He nodded, lay a finger across his lips. Together they watched the white haired, elegantly attired Doctor go into his TARDIS. A moment later, it vanished.

"Yes, well," the remaining Doctor said. "I suppose I should be going, too- I promised Adric I wouldn't be long, but that boy is absolutely terrible at waiting for anything. That impatience of his will be the death of him someday..." He put on his heavy red coat, clapped his hat on his head, looked down at K9 III. "Take good care of your mistress, K9."

"Affirmative, Master."

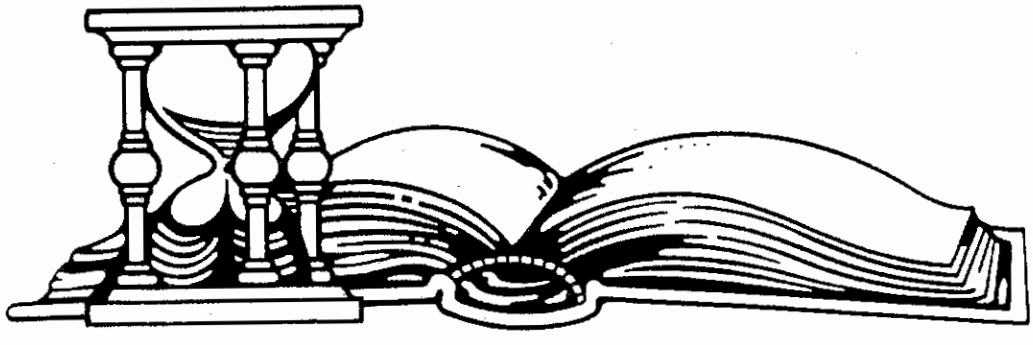
"Maybe I should send him along with you," Sarah said, "to look after YOU!"

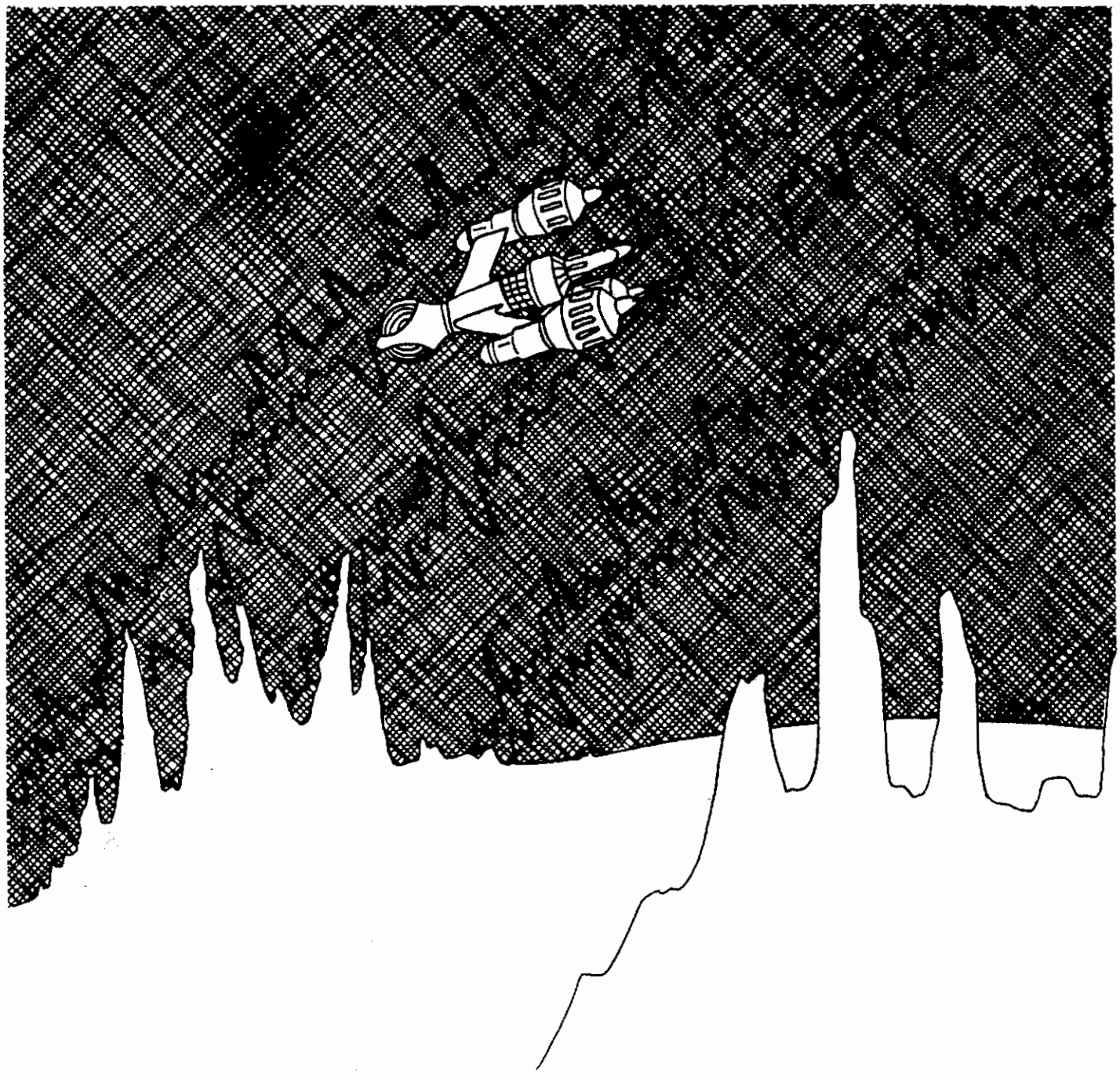
"Nonsense," the Doctor said. "How much trouble can I get into on Logopolis? - Barnett bypass, did you say? Think I'll stop off there first and take a look at that police box..." He paused on the doorstep. "Goodbye, Sarah Jane. And please don't worry, I'll survive."

"I know." she retorted, blinking rapidly. "I've met him!"

He grinned, waved, and turned, walking quickly down the sidewalk. It was dusk, and the fog was in, and he soon disappeared from Sarah's sight.

She closed the door, sighed. They were each so different, and yet - so VERY Doctorish. Smiling to herself, she gathered up the tea things.





SACRIFICE

by William Ader

Avon entered Cally's quarters without knocking. "How is she, Jenna?"

"Still unconscious. Her fever is rampant and her breathing shallow. We've got to get to Chronos-3 soon and collect those spores. The extract from them is the only thing that will wipe out this virus that's ravaging her system."

"You are sure there is no medication on board which would help her?"

"You saw the medical diagnostic report. It's a fever peculiar to her species. She needs that extract within the next five hours. I wish Blake were here, instead of organizing the resistance on Paron-5."

"You doubt my ability to lead?"

"No, I've never doubted your ability, Avon, only your motivation."

"Cally is useful. That is why I'll see to it that we arrive at Chronos-3 in time. We should be in stationary orbit there in approximately four hours."

* * * * * * *

Avon returned to the flight deck and awoke Vila from his "watch" as Zen reported: +INFORMATION. SENSORS INDICATE AN UNARMED CRAFT AT ZERO-FIVE-ZERO, 1500 SPACIALS AND HOLDING AT THAT DISTANCE. VISUAL CONFIRMATION NOW BEING ESTABLISHED.+

"Put it on the screen," ordered Avon.

"Servalan!" exclaimed Vila. "What do you want?"

"I didn't travel all this way to chat with a pick-pocket," replied Servalan. "Where is Blake?"

"Home for the holidays," said Avon. "I am in command."

"Excellent. I had received reports that Blake was away from the Liberator--his absence suits my purposes perfectly. Avon, I have a proposition for you."

"And I have one for you," responded Avon as he armed the neutron blasters. "Before I destroy you, I'll give you time to say your prayers--if you promise to put in a good word for me."

Vila summoned Jenna to the flight deck as Avon locked the neutron blasters onto Servalan's craft.

"Why Avon, I've never known you to act in haste," said Servalan as Jenna arrived on the flight deck.

"Zen, deep scan Servalan's craft for any type of weaponry," ordered Jenna.

+NEGATIVE WEAPONRY.+

"I am also alone," said Servalan, wearily rolling her eyes.

"Zen?" asked Avon.

+THE INFORMATION IS CORRECT. THE CRAFT IS VOICE-PILOTED AND CARRIES ONLY THE ONE WHOM YOU REFER TO AS SERVALAN.+

"You said you had a proposition," said Avon. "What is it?"

"It concerns power and money--two of your favorite subjects. Teleport a bracelet to me, bring me aboard the Liberator and we can talk."

"Avon, no!" exclaimed Jenna.

"You understand there will be a weapon trained on you at all times while you're onboard," said Avon.

"Ah, yes, your trusting nature. I would be disappointed if it were to be otherwise."

"It's a trap," said Vila.

"You're actually going to let her come aboard, aren't you?" asked Jenna. "Blake would never..."

"Blake isn't here," interrupted Avon. "How is Cally?"

"Stable...for now. Nothing must interfere with our reaching Chronos-3, though."

"Very well," said Avon as he turned back toward the screen and smiled broadly. "Permission granted to come aboard."

* * * * * * *

Jenna held a deadly aim as Servalan stepped from the teleport and mockingly modeled her latest acquisition from Sachs Fifth Galaxy. "Like it? I wore it just for you, Avon."

"I'm told even Lizzie Borden was not unattractive," replied Avon.

"But enough small talk," said Servalan. "You may as well know that, though I am unarmed, I am not unprotected. Jenna, go ahead and fire."

Jenna looked quizzically at Avon, then at Vila, then at Servalan. "With pleasure," said Jenna as she fired point blank. The effect was akin to shining a flashlight on Servalan.

Dumbstruck at first, Jenna finally managed to say, "I...I...I don't understand."

"This pendant hanging round my throat is in fact composed of a remarkable dual crystalline compound which soaks up focused energy like a sponge."

"Where could you have gotten such a thing?" asked Avon.

"That's what I've come to talk to you about."

"I should look in on Cally," said Jenna.

"Cally is unwell?" asked Servalan.

"A fever peculiar to her species. There's a cure on Chronos-3. She'll be fine. Your concern is touching, indeed," said Avon with unveiled sarcasm as they arrived on the flight deck. "Please, be seated," he said, motioning gallantly.

"Of course I'm concerned," said Servalan. "We are all going to be great friends. And I was wondering why you were headed for Chronos-3. After all, there's nothing there but a scattering of plants surrounded by horrendous deserts. Beyond that, all it offers is a spectacular view of its three rings."

"Yes, once a month the miners from Nimbos come to load up with high-grade silica. Hardly a tourist's paradise. We'll be there in about three hours. But, tell me more about this crystal substance and its remarkable properties. No doubt it has something to do with the proposition you mentioned."

You were impressed by my little demonstration?"

"Something like that would be worth a lot of money," said Vila.

"More than that, Vila. Such technology would offer its owner unlimited power," added Avon. "Where did you get it, Servalan?"

"It was developed on Deutron-6," said Servalan. "They are a peace-loving people, technologically advanced, but politically naive. This is, of course, only a sample, enough to protect myself and my small craft, but not a cruiser or a fighter. With enough of this substance, entire fleets, even planets, could be rendered immune to attacks. One of the technicians who developed it is willing to sell the technology for 30 million credits. The Federation needs this substance. With it, we will be invulnerable, hence, invincible."

"But you need us to..."

"Do two things. Get me to Deutron-6 within the next six hours and use ORAC to convince my contact's computer that 30 million credits have been placed into her account."

"Double-crossing the double-crosser, are you?" asked Avon, to which Servalan would only smile.

"Why do you have to be there within six hours?" asked Vila.

"Because the traitor--I mean 'entrepreneur'--willing to sell the technology will be leaving the planet shortly to participate in an intergalactic expedition. Since they are invulnerable to attack, the only way to get the crystals is by having help from the inside."

"And in return for our assistance you will give us...?" Avon asked.

"My undying gratitude," replied Servalan, beaming. "And a full pardon, along with 15 million credits. You will be free and wealthy! Once I have a steady source of these crystals, you and your Liberator will no longer be a threat to my Federation. Avon, you'll be able to plunder the non-aligned planets at will. You'll have access to unlimited wealth with no interference from us. Your attacks would actually help the Federation by convincing the non-aligned planets to seek our protection. But I need the speed of the Liberator and the use of ORAC's peculiar talents."

"What about Blake? He would be pardoned as well?" asked Avon.

"That, I'm afraid, is impossible," Servalan answered.

"Zen, after we arrive at Chronos-3, how long will it take to get to Deutron-6?" queried Avon.

+AT MAXIMUM SPEED, EIGHT HOURS+

"That will not do!" exclaimed Servalan.

Avon moved toward ORAC and, standing beside him, said, "Zen, until I order otherwise, you are take instructions only from me."

+CONFIRMED+

"Avon!" cried Jenna and Vila in unison.

"Zen, how long would it take to get to Deutron-6 if we changed course now?"

+FIVE HOURS, 3.2 MINUTES+

"Avon, think of Cally! Deutron-6 is in the opposite direction from Chronos-3. Cally will die! At your hands!"

"Nothing is gained without sacrifice," said Servalan.

"I've decided nothing," said Avon. "I'm thinking."

Jenna glared at Avon. "I'm going to check on Cally."

"I'll go with you," said Vila. "I don't much like the company we're entertaining these days."

"Wait," said Servalan. "I knew Avon would listen to reason and was equally sure those inferior to him would not. You'll notice this other crystal on the back of the pendant. It is harmonically synchronized to the frequency of your drive units. I have only to speak a trigger word, and it will vibrate in a such a manner that your drive unit will spill deadly Gantron Radiation throughout the Liberator."

"Ah yes, invariably lethal, as there is no known cure for those exposed to it. Unless, of course, one has received a series of immunizing treatments prior to exposure," said Avon.

"Treatments which Servalan has undoubtedly already undergone," added Jenna, staring hatefully at Servalan.

"It will take me a few minutes to work out with ORAC the particulars concerning the bogus credit transfer," said Avon. "I'll be in my quarters doing that. Once we know ORAC can do it, we'll set a course for Deutron-6."

"You would do that, Avon?" asked Jenna with disgust.

"You'd rather we all died?" replied Avon.

"You were ready to sacrifice Cally as soon as Servalan outlined her plan," said Vila.

"At that time I said I was thinking," said Avon. "Something the both of you might try sometime."

Servalan went to Avon and gently stroked his cheek as she said, "You won't regret this."

"No," said Avon. "No...I won't regret this." Turning to Jenna and Vila, Avon said impatiently, "Well, go check on Cally. Make her comfortable, at least."

Jenna managed to sputter out a venom-coated, "For all you care!" as she and Vila left the flight deck.

Avon picked up ORAC to take to his quarters.

"I've always admired you, Avon," said Servalan. "You have a strong sense of who number one is and you're not afraid to follow that sense to its logical conclusion. You are a far better man than Blake. A better man than Travis, for that matter. I wouldn't mind getting to know you better."

"I imagine that when this little mission is accomplished, you will know me better," he said as he departed the flight deck with ORAC.

A few minutes later, Avon returned with ORAC.

"Well?" asked Servalan impatiently.

"Zen, set a course for Deutron-6, standard by ten," said Avon as Vila entered the flight deck.

+CONFIRMED+

"Settle in for the ride, Supreme Commander. I'm going to look in on Cally," said Avon.

"Do give her my regards," said Servalan.

* * * * * * *

Avon again entered Cally's quarters without knocking.

"How is she, Jenna?"

"Dying, Avon! That's how she is! You allow Servalan to come aboard the Liberator because she dangles wealth and power in front of you. And the price is Cally's life. May the rest of yours be wretched because of it," said Jenna as she stormed from the room.

Avon, alone now with Cally, quietly closed the door and went to Cally's bedside. Kneeling beside her, he gently took her limp hand in his. "Can you know what I do, and understand why?" he whispered. After a long pause, he spoke aloud, "But there is work to do," and drew himself up purposefully, leaving Cally without looking back.

* * * * * * *

Upon returning to the flight deck, Avon found Servalan checking the various instrument displays. "Not that I don't trust you, Avon. But I do want to make sure we are headed for Deutron-6."

"Zen, visual display."

+CONFIRMED+

"Satisfied? That's the star system in the upper right quadrant. Zen, magnify display area containing Deutron-6."

+CONFIRMED+

Servalan smiled. "I knew you wouldn't disappoint me. Have you been thinking of ways in which to enjoy your soon-to-be-won wealth and freedom from pursuit?"

"Yes...I have been thinking."

Jenna entered the flight deck and quietly conferred with Vila for a few moments. When they finished, they confronted Avon. "Avon," said Jenna, "when this is over, both Vila and I are leaving you and the Liberator. We'll have won our 'pardons' and our share of the credits. But we want nothing more to do with you or your 'new-found friends'. We will somehow get back to Blake and tell him what you've done. Unless you plan to kill us, too."

"Don't be silly. I wouldn't kill you. You are useful. Anyway, you will change your mind when you've thought this through. And you wouldn't leave the Liberator with Cally in my care, would you?"

"Cally will be dead. Can't you understand that?" asked Vila.

"Perhaps she can hold on just a bit

longer. Once Servalan completes the deal on Deutron-6, we'll be heading straight back to Chronos-3. You have my word."

"Then we can bury Cally there," said Jenna. "For all intents and purposes, you've already dug her grave."

* * * * * * *

The hours passed by slowly. Avon and Servalan had retired to Avon's quarters, ostensibly to "talk". Jenna and Vila kept watch on the flight deck, unable to alter the Liberator's course.

-INFORMATION. LIBERATOR IS NOW IN STATIONARY ORBIT AROUND DEUTRON-6-

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Servalan as she and Avon, both somewhat rumpled, entered the flight deck.

"We must teleport to these coordinates immediately," Servalan said, handing the information to Jenna.

"Right," said Jenna.

"No, I think not," said Avon, smiling. "ORAC will operate the teleport. Jenna is a bit miffed at me and may not want to bring us back aboard." He took the coordinates from Jenna's hand.

Vila and Jenna looked at each other in a way which acknowledged the failure of their plan.

"Nice try," said Avon to both of them.

Avon spoke to ORAC. "Implement instructions previously entered."

It is done.

When they arrived to the teleport section, Avon gave ORAC the coordinates. Stepping into the teleport platform, Avon ordered, "Teleport now."

* * * * * * *

"Down and safe," reported Avon.

"This...this isn't Deutron-6!" exclaimed Servalan, almost overwhelmed by the scorching desert's heat.

"Hmmm," said Avon, looking around. "I believe you may be right. Why, look," he said, pointing overhead. "Three rings. Looks like Chronos-3 to me."

"We've been tricked!" exclaimed Servalan. "How could you have let those imbeciles Jenna and Vila do this to us? You...you incompetent..."

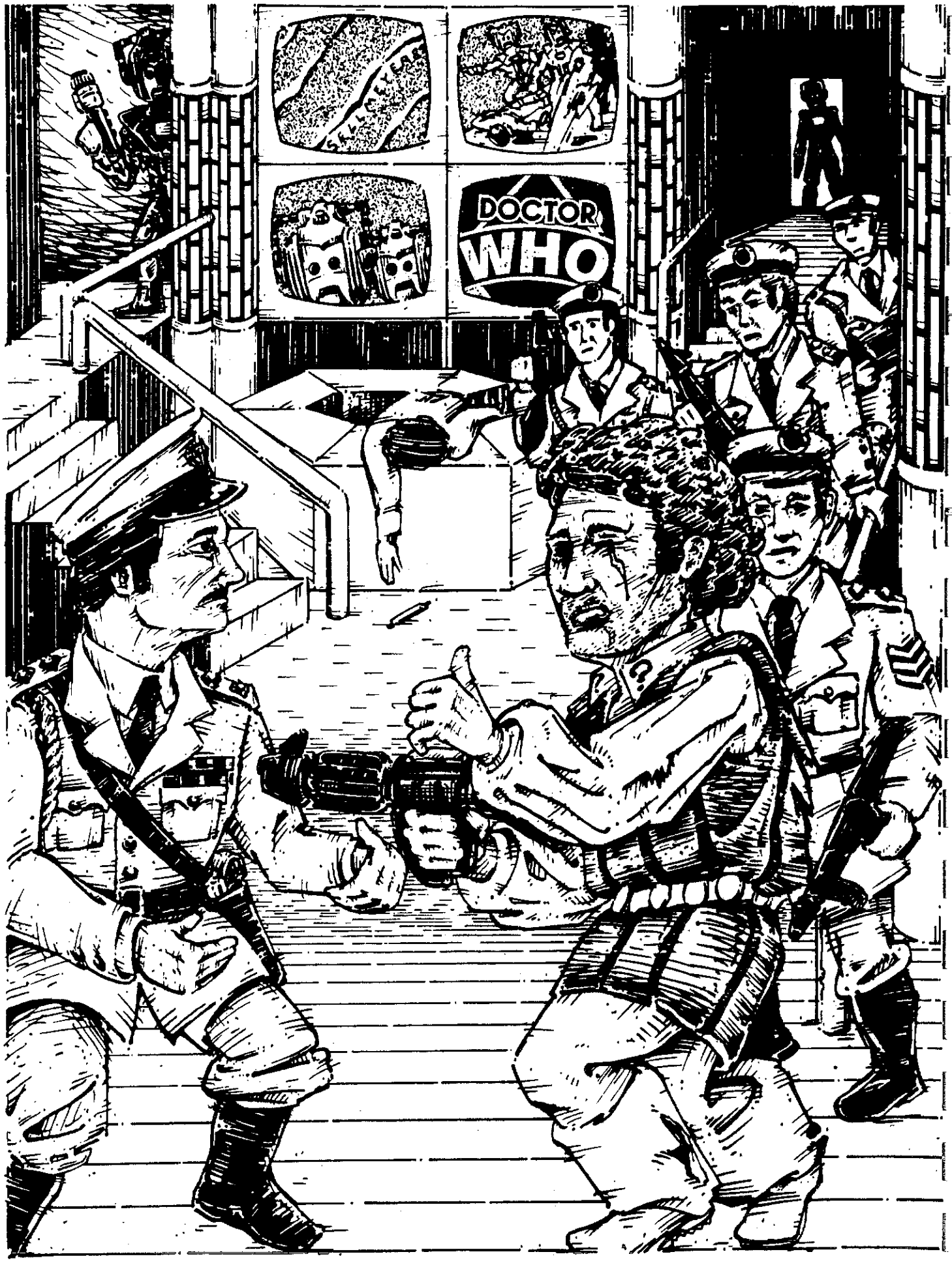
"Jenna and Vila had nothing to do with it. When I took ORAC to my quarters, I arranged for him to interface with Zen and lock the Liberator onto our course for Chronos-3, all the while maintaining an elaborate simulation of a transit to Deutron-6. All instrument displays, including Zen's visual and audio reports, were under ORAC's control the whole time. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have some spores to collect." Avon turned away from Servalan, then quickly turned back. "But I forget my manners. Thank you, Supreme Commander, for this afternoon," said Avon with an almost imperceptible wink.

"You will pay dearly for this--with your very life," screamed Servalan.

"I'll have at least a two-week head start. That's when the next Nimbos mining shuttle is due here. And if you're really nice to those miners, who have been in deep space for six months, if you're really friendly to them, I'm sure they'll be more than happy to provide you with transportation off this god-forsaken planet."

"Avon, do you have any idea what you're giving up?"

"Nothing is gained without sacrifice," answered Avon.


DOCTOR
WHO

THE LAST REGENERATION

by C.K. Smith

art by Mark Sellmeyer

The cowardly young Earthman called Willis woke from his most opportune faint just in time to watch his friend the Doctor die. The Doctor stood silently, positioned astride the crumpled bloodied body of Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart.

For months now the Doctor had been going slowly mad, progressively obsessional, while he and his diverse group of companions struggled in vain against the evil Cyber empire. Planet after planet had fallen. Somehow it seemed they knew his plans even before he did, and today the reason had become evident. Apparently their long-time friend and one-time Earth security leader from U.N.I.T. had betrayed them.

"He's sold us, Doctor!" Former Warrant Officer Benton was also a past comrade of the Brigadier's and a rebel companion of the Doctor's in recent months.

Shaking his abundant curly brown hair, the Doctor couldn't believe it. His tall bulky frame trembled and his voice nearly cracked. "Is it true? Have you betrayed me?"

The flamboyant pirate sailor's garb the Doctor had adopted in this last regeneration looked strangely incongruous now. Somehow it seemed Time Lords always were distinctive dressers, but now he was no longer the dashing leader of the anti-Cyber rebellion. He was a tormented and broken thing; an outlawed and even more outcast Time Lord since he had broken, yet again, with their tradition of non-interference and adopted an aggressive rebel role. Responding to his own 'higher' principles, he could not stand by and allow the destruction of humanity at the hands of these robotic creatures.

"I've been waiting for you," Lethbridge-Stewart claimed. Shocked and bewildered, the Doctor pleaded with him to "Stand still." But he had not done so, and the Doctor was armed. So in the end, the Doctor had killed his friend in cold blood, temporarily losing his own mind to shock in the process.

Willis was afraid of guns. He had always been afraid of them, and these were especially bad ones, much worse than anything he had ever seen in the streets of his home in 19th Century London. Barely sixteen, he had been an orphan and a street kid when the Doctor picked him up. Willis Rascal had survived the best way he could. He had been a master pickpocket and thief--until the Doctor had tried to reform him, that was.

No sooner had the Doctor fired and the Brigadier fallen than a patrol of his Cybermen allies surrounded them all, and young Willis watched in terror as all the other companions were murdered, falling one by one. That was the last thing he knew. The street urchin thought he was dying himself for certain. Meanwhile, standing heartbroken above the remains of his one-time friend, the crazed Doctor quickly snatched up nearby Officer Benton's gold dust-spewing weapon, spraying the air all around with it, and the robots were destroyed at the same instant that they took his own life.

When he regained his wits, Willis scrambled across on his hands and knees to where the Doctor lay. He watched amazed as his shape changed and his size shrunk. The Doctor was regenerating for the twelfth and last time.

Moments later a completely different Time Lord opened his eyes. This one had straight brown hair, he had lost his curls. This one was much less bulky and had distinctive piercing dark brown eyes. A student of faces, Willis thought his late Time Lord had almost a Welsh countenance, yet the features of this one looked almost "Roman", especially the nose.

The previous Doctor had been soft spoken and a leader by virtue of his physical size and his gentle yet powerful capacity for persuasion. This one opened his eyes, looked up and said, "Well, fool, what are you looking at?"

When he stood unsteadily upright the flamboyant cavalier's shirt and open leather vest hung off his narrower shoulders. He had to hold on to the green leather trousers, lest they fall as he surveyed the carnage around him. "Don't you think you ought to get to work and clean up this mess?"

"ME?" Willis knew that things would not be the same with this Doctor.

Hours later, the thief had finished his gruesome clean-up task, and he retired, grieving and exhausted, with a bottle of gin for comfort. When he woke again and returned to the TARDIS's control room, he found the Doctor three quarters up inside the main computer drive controls, only his lower legs and feet visible. The new Doctor wore black leather pants and low cut shoes. "What are you doing?" his light-fingered companion wondered. Like all thieves, Willis was very curious.

"Nothing special...I have made some adjustments--refinements on the TARDIS control unit and I hot-wired a new chameleon circuit. It's about time, can't imagine why the last Doctor left it broken...bloody idealists!" Then he pulled himself out of the mechanism and Willis noticed that, unlike the loose fitting garb the old Doctor fancied, this one wore a close fitting tunic suit of black leather all decorated with silver studs. He looked like some futuristic motorcyclist, quite bizarre, quite menacing.

"Doctor, what are we going to do now? What's the plan?"

Slowly turning to look down at the low-born London thief, the twelfth and last Doctor smiled down at him with a cynical, one-sided grin. "Well now...I am only going to live once and I find the idea of being wealthy quite appealing. Don't you?"

Greedy, Willis Rascal smiled himself, but then he was shocked when the Doctor said, "TARDIS, plot a direct course to what's left of the planet of gold...best possible speed." He fainted, passing out cold again, when the TARDIS answered.

"Yes, master...at once, Master."

THE DOCTOR VISITS MELMAC...
WELL... THERE GOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD !!
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BANDERSNATCH PRESS
Submission Guidelines

GENERAL NOTES

Please do NOT send originals to me. The USPS is well known for folding, spindling, mutilating and losing submissions. I will take no responsibility for their loss. When you do make copies, be sure to get a good, clear and viewable reproduction.

When submitting work to me, please enclose a cover letter with your name, address, and telephone number. Also put sufficient postage on the envelope—it will add brownie points to your work. A SASE (self addressed stamped envelope) for my reply is always appreciated—and in the event you do send originals to me, it's the only way you'll get them back.

All submissions will be read/viewed/evaluated. You will be notified of the status of your submission as soon as I can write it down and mail it. Please be patient—if you haven't heard from me after six weeks, drop me a line and gently remind me. You will be notified when the zine goes to press.

When you submit any work to me, it is general courtesy not to submit that work to any other fanzine until you know whether I'm going to use it or not. If I do learn that you have submitted any piece to other zines, I will immediately drop it from consideration. Your work is part of the saleability of my zine—if a buyer finds the same story in two zines, he/she may buy one over the other because of it.

I will consider previously-published work, so long as a) you tell me it was previously published, and b) you tell me where it was published and provide me the editor's name and address.

CONTRIBUTOR COPIES

My standard requirement is that you must have at least three full pages of material published in the issue your work appears in to receive a free copy.

Those who do not meet this requirement will receive a discount on the final cost of the zine in which their work appears.

WRITER GUIDELINES

Manuscripts must be typed with numbered pages. Double-spaced lines are preferable, but single will be tolerated. Any hand-written submissions will be returned unread.

When submitting your work, be sure to use a dark ribbon so that when I make copies for artists, etc., a clear, readable version comes out.

I'm in the market for DOCTOR WHO, BLAKES 7, and BUCKAROO BANZAI stories first and foremost for all my zines. Other genres will be considered. All Doctors, Rebels, and Cavaliers are welcome.

I am looking for stories that are true to the established characters and have a semblence of a plot. If a character strays from his/her established personna, there had better be a good reason for it.

"Mary Sue" stories (where a new character bearing an odd resemblence to the creator steps in, saves the day, and starts a passionate love affair with the lead characters) will be looked at, but it will take an extraordinary story to get it accepted. "Talking Heads" stories (where it's all character development—sometimes—and little action) are the same situation.

Angst, humor, action, horror—all are welcome. I want stories that are off the beaten track.

Any story with explicit sexual content will be considered for THE NAUGHTY BITS, but not for BANZINE! Editorial judgement will be used to determine where a story falls. No slash (homosexual situation) stories will be accepted. Read, yes, but not accepted.

I reserve the right to correct grammar, punctuation and spelling. Reference work is THE ELEMENTS OF STYLE by W. Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White. Sometimes I will suggest possible revisions/additions/deletions in an effort to make the story clearer, but the author is not obligated to accept these recommendations. No changes in plot/style will be made without the writer's approval.

ARTISTS GUIDELINES

Artwork should be be done on heavy paper (bonded/bristol) with either pen, ink, or black felt tip pen. This will aid in making a good, clear copy for me to use. Half-tones are too difficult and expensive for me to use at this time. Be sure that copies of your art are clear and dark enough for me to use.

I cannot at this time use color illos. Please use only black and white. And go easy on black tones; printers have fits trying to properly reproduce it.

When you illo a story, READ IT CAREFULLY! If you have questions, contact me. I will usually want an illo for every 3-5 pages. I like "header" illos—featuring story title, author, and artist on it—but it's not a requirement. I reserve the right to reduce/enlarge illos, depending on space considerations.

When mailing your work to me, please use a large enough envelope so that it can be sent flat, and use cardboard backing so that the wonderful creatures at the U.S. Postal Service won't have it for lunch.

If you insist on sending originals, and you want your art returned, please say so when you send it in, and enclose a SASE with sufficient postage.

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Presenting the second issue of BANDERSNATCH PRESS's adult fanzine featuring stories from BLAKES 7, DOCTOR WHO, BUCKAROO BANZAI, and other genres! Stories include

TEMPORAL DISCORDANCE *by Pat Nussman–Two B7 fans at a Chicago con exit an elevator and find themselves wondering "how much is that Alpha in the auction? The one with the leather and studs "*

TOWER PARADISE *by Tom K. Giza–The Doctor and Mel return to Paradise Towers for a visit, and get caught in a battle between the Red and Blue Kangs to see who can out-"how-you-do" whom...and then there's Pex's twin brother.*

HALLOWEEN STORY *by Lisa Savignano–Romance and mystery surround the Banzai Institute's annual Halloween Party...*

FRIENDSHIP *by Julia Jay–The Doctor unexpectedly discovers the source of Romana's icy, superior nature.*

SET UP *by Ann Wortham & Leah Rosenthal–All I'm saying is that it's one of their twisted B7 stories...*

CHILD OF THE NIGHT *by Jeff Morris–The Fifth Doctor is transformed into a vampire.. and searches desperately for a cure along with his two lovely, warm-blooded companions.*

LANDSLIDE *by Maggie Farmer–Avon's last night with Anna Grant.*

THE SURVEY *by L.J. Whorfin–The Fifth Doctor discovers to his horror what Nyssa's been doing with her spare time on the TARDIS!*

UNEXPECTED DIVERSIONS *by Lisa Conner–A more adult section of the "Eir'yn's Uncle" saga, where a chance "one time stand" for the Doctor forces him to discuss the facts of life to his young companion.*

IN A LITTLE SPANISH TOWN *by Eric Hoffman–An alternative ending to THE TWO DOCTORS, where Peri and Jamie go exploring...*

DARK EYES *by Maggie Farmer–It's Servalan, Avon, a dark room, a big bed...need we go on?*

LESSONS *by Lisa Savignano–Electric Blue discovers a few things about male/female relationships both first and second hand at the Banzai Institute.*

SLIME AND THE RANI *by Vivian Arha– Peri borrows a Gallifreyan aphrodisiac from the Rani's TARDIS "just to see what happens"...*

And THERE'S ART THIS TIME! So far, we've got Leah Rosenthal, Lisa Conner, Chris Cook, and Nora Mai on tap, and more to come! By the way, submissions are still open, though I can use more stuff from genres other than DW and B7. There'll also be a LOC column for bouquets and brickbats on NAUGHTY BITS.

Interested? A check/money order for $5.00 (made out to Jeff Morris) and a SASE for final notification of cost will reserve you a copy. Projected publication date is Spring '90. YOU MUST INCLUDE A SIGNED STATEMENT THAT YOU ARE OVER 18 YEARS OF AGE WITH YOUR ORDER. Otherwise, you may find a crazed Great Dane panting at your door...

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THE HERSHEY TREATMENT *by Malefica Blue–"But the ice cream was essential, Cally "*

ADDICTED TO LOVE *by Lady Whorfin–Someone's out to get Perfect Tommy, and isn't above trying an old Japanese passion potion to do it, but what happens when the wrong people get on the receiving end?*

MOONGAZING *by Lady Adastra–When Jo wears a mini-miniskirt to work, the Doctor finds himself viewing a true "heavenly body"!*

FROG *by Kevin Decker–When Elizabeth receives a marriage proposal from the King of France, Lord Edmund Blackadder winds up escorting her and ends up in the middle of an assassination conspiracy!*

THE NIGHT SHIFT *by L.J. Whorfin–When Buckaroo Banzai finds himself unable to sleep, he discovers that most of the Institute's personnel are too "busy" to bother with rest.*

WHAT ARE FRIENDS FOR? *by Ann Wortham & Leah Rosenthal–Sure enough, someone just HAD to bend the "no slash" rule. Avon has had enough of life, and tells Vila to do "whatever he wants" to him. famous last words...*

THE SAGA OF ELECTRIC BLUE *by Lisa Savignano–a young woman wandering aimlessly through life finds purpose and love at the Banzai Institute.*

THE EUPHIO EFFECT *by L.J. Whorfin–The Fifth Doctor shows Tegan and Nyssa some of the "perils" of time travelling through the Vortex...*

DIRTY DIVERSIONS *by Mal O'Dar–Immortality has its problems–just ask Dorian. When you've tried literally everything, what can keep your interest? Perhaps a cold, beautiful woman who also happens to be the fastest draw around?*

THE DIRTY DOCTOR SKETCH *by Tom K. Giza–The Fifth Doctor gets zapped with Kontron energy, which gives him an irresistable attraction for the "finer" things in life...*

FIRE AND ICE *by Madelyn Darring–After a long, hard day of rabble-rousing, Soolin and Avon find that a good long shower can get pretty hot!*

THE INTERGALACTIC BORDELLO *by Eric Hoffman–Ever wonder how the Master manages to finance all his various takeover schemes, or where he runs off to between episodes? Wonder no more, as the Doctor and Peri discover the hottest cross-universe intersection point!*

NOBODY'S BUSINESS *by Atlanta Lea–When Harry and Sarah are forced to "perform" on behalf of an alien culture, their relationship undergoes a radical, painful change*

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P.S.–We're accepting submissions for MORE NAUGHTY BITS, due out in early 1990! Send a SASE to the above address for guidelines.

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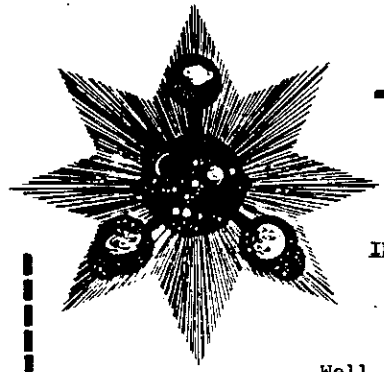

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We have a monthly meeting in the NYC area, and a monthly newsletter called ON THE ROCKS (have we mentioned we have a fondness for bars?).

No, no, I'm afraid, you say? They're frothing! you say? Well, try us out with a sample newsletter for $1.

No, no, I'm a brave little trooper, and as long as I have my standard issue (geshundheit) weapon I might as well, you say? Then, enter the rolicking world of unleased Soprons for only $8 for a year's membership-- Really, getting state certification for your personal insanity costs a lot more!

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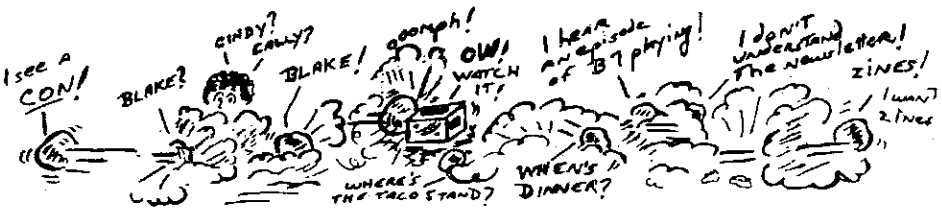

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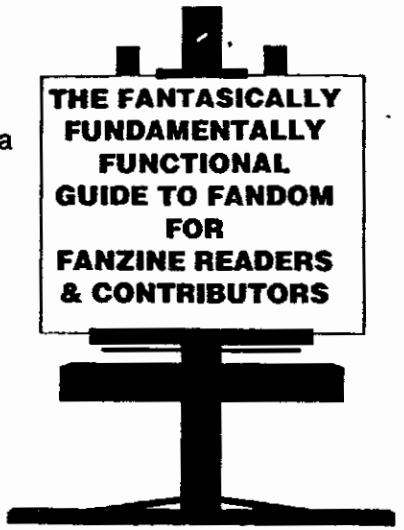

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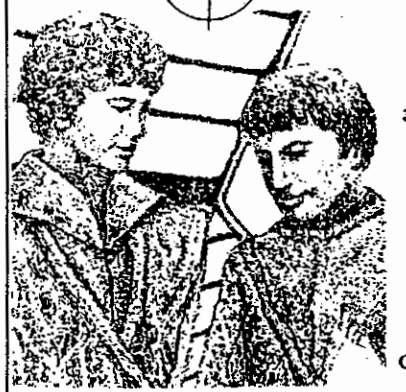

Art by Kathy Coy

Release Date: November, 1989

GAMBIT 5

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IN ISSUE #5:

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With art by:
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GAMBIT 6 will accept submissions until Feb. 28, 1990. SASE for full guidelines.

PEACOCK PRESS

SOUTHERN SEVEN 7

SOUTHERN SEVEN #7 is chock-full of refugees from SOUTHERN SEVEN #6 and will, hopefully, be appearing at approximately the same time as issue #6. Here is a sampling of the stories already lined up for you in yet another "mega" issue of SOUTHERN SEVEN!

GHOSTS by Kristy Marrill: There's someone--or something--onboard the Liberator and it has already killed the crew of another ship...

THE STARBORN by Kaye Dunham: A mission gone wrong isn't the only problem facing the crew of the Liberator when Vila rescues a baby!

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF GUILT by Linda Knights: In the wake of Gauda Prime, Avon confronts some hard truths about himself...

RICH MAN, POOR MAN, JOKER, THIEF by Barbara Tennison: Avon must come to terms with the fact that he is a thief living among criminals...

PROBABILITY FACTOR by Roberta Brown: Servalan's true origins are revealed and the Liberator is regained in quite an unusual, unique way!

YET ANOTHER GARDEN PARADISE by Shoshanna Green: The Liberator needs repairs but a trip to the planet Bailey's Seven to mine for crystals could prove fatal to Vila!

VILA RESTAL AND THE ENCHANTED DRAKE OF OZ by Dee Bastam & Maryaret McNickle: Vila was just minding his own business when suddenly he found himself in a strange place where ducks talked and asked him to go on rescue missions...

THE INNOCENT by Karen Yost: Perhaps Avon didn't have a very happy childhood...that's okay, though, because a race of aliens is going to give him another chance!

RIPPLE EFFECT by Roberta Brown: Avon seemed to have inordinately bad luck...was it just fate or something else more sinister...?

VAULT by Jennifer Smallwood: Vila Restal could never resist a challenge...but this vault could prove to be his undoing!

HISTORY WILL TEACH US NOTHING by Vickie McManus: A teleport malfunction lands Blake in a universe gone topsy-turvy...

WILDERNESS SOJOURN by Peggy Hartsook: A mission into the wilderness of Kenore goes awry when the "figurehead" Blake wants to return to his people balks at the notion...

FORGIVE ME ALL MY SINS by Robert Collins: It's a long time since Gauda Prime but Avon still remembers...and tries to forget...

HALLUCINATIONS by Nicole Petty & Michelle Moyer: Avon's "hallucination" tries to warn him of Gauda Prime but he pays no heed...

TO SLEEP, PERCHANCE TO DREAM by Sophia Mulvey: Cally was dead...or was she?

WHAT THE NIGHT CAN DO by April Giordano: Avon's companions send him to a doctor after Gauda Prime and learn a startling truth about the computer tech's true "nature."

A NEW BEGINNING by Mary Pat Cheney: Years after Gauda Prime, Avon reflects on the changes in government and his friends since Blake's rebellion began...

Artwork by Leigh Motooka, Leah Rosenthal, Laura Virgil, Suzan Lovett, Theresa Buffalow, Suzie Molnar, Mariann Howarth, Adrian Morgan, Holly Hutchison, Judith Kitzes, Mary Gerstner, Kate Knepper, and others.

To reserve your copy of the zine, send $5.00 + a long SASE to: Ann Worthen, 1402 Allison Ave., Altamonte Springs, Florida 32701.

SOUTHERN SEVEN 6

SOUTHERN SEVEN #6 has overflowed its boundaries and taken over SOUTHERN SEVEN #7! That's right, one zine has now become two, but you can still expect to see gobs and gobs of material from newcomers and old-timers alike in both upcoming issues. Look at the flip side for a preview of SOUTHERN SEVEN #7. In the meantime...

THE STAND by Katrina Larkin & Suzanne Tilley: THE LOG OF THE HELLHOUND continues in BOOK VI as the crew of the Hellhound is trapped by Nik Theodorides' plan. While Avon's torture is physical, Blake's is psychological, and the latter's lack of leadership in a moment of crisis may doom them all. Meanwhile, their only hope of rescue, the Snake-in-the-Grass, has been reclaimed by her former owners...

PROPHECY by Janet Paderewski: Vila attempts to help Avon by taking his place on a mission...and ends up in a place from which he might not be able to return...

ELVIS IS EVERYWHERE! by Jeff & Mary Morris: Cally is bemused by the nocturnal changes in Avon, but she could grow to like them...

NAUGHTY GIRLS NEED LOVE TOO by Michele Lallouche: A little R&R goes awry for Blake and Avon when they run into Servalan...in the strangest place!

KNIGHT IN LEATHER ARMOR by Kathy Coy: This time everybody but Avon is in a coma...

FIREBREAK by K. D. Swan: Vila's method of dealing with Malodaar shocks even Avon...

DAYS IN THE DEATH by Shoshanna Green: Avon's scheme was perfect and brilliant...but he didn't count on Anna...

IT'S ALL DONE BY MAGIC by Linda Knights: A magician tells Blake more about his "past" than the rebel ever wanted to know...

SUBTERFUGE by Anne Collins Smith: Avon is captured and scheduled for interrogation...will Blake save him in time...?

OUT OF CONTROL by Jamie Ritchey: Vila discovers a secret on Xenon Base...a secret which could be the death of not only him, but Avon as well!

CHANGING STATIONS by Kaye Dunham: Avon and Vila with Will Robinson and the Robot?? Servalan with Dr. Smith?? Uh-oh!

AND THEN I CARE NOT by Jane Carnall: Avon killed a clone on Gauda Prime...and Blake considers it murder!

WALKABOUT by Shoshanna Green: A study of Soolin...

THE DESPERADOS by H. S. Lavijoki: Gauda Prime was peopled with simple farmers...until Avon and the survivors of a desperate battle invade it...

NIGHTWOOD REST by Adrian Morgan & Brendan O'Cullane: A chance encounter could be the "death" of Parl Dro, not to mention Hyal Lamyal!

HOMECOMING by Julie Mosak: Avon's been on the run so long that all he longs for is peace...

LETTERS OF COMMENT and THE FEDERATION SPACE ACADEMY FINAL EXAM!!!

Much more in the works.

Artwork by Leigh Motooka, Leah Rosenthal, Laura Virgil, Suzi Lovett, Theresa Buffalow, Suzie Molnar, Mariann Howarth, Adrian Morgan, Gayle Feyrer, Maryann Jorgensen, Katrina Larkin, and others.

To reserve your copy of the zine, send $5.00 + a long SASE to: Ann Worthen, 1402 Allison Ave., Altamonte Springs, Florida 32701.

Submissions are open for future issues of SOUTHERN SEVEN and BLAKES DOUBLES. Please allow a minimum of 6-8 weeks for replies and don't forget to include a SASE.

SOUTHERN LIGHTS 5

BLAKE'S 7

"Madhouse Blues" by Kaye Dunham: A mission to rescue a rebel prisoner holds a few surprises for Avon's crew...

"Blakes Seven Get Smart With A Team Lost In Space" by Felix Sylvestris: What does it sound like? The ultimate B7 crossover, that's what!

"Nature of the Beast" by Kaye Dunham: Just what kind of animal would Avon be...? Servalan...? A mission gone wrong (of course) allows Scorpio's crew to find out!

Art by Leah Rosenthal & Theresa Buffaloe.

SIMON & SIMON

"Be Mine to Guard" by Joan Bright: Rick relives some poignant moments and remembers how A.J. always gave him the strength to carry on...

MIAMI VICE

"Making It" by Liz Sharpe: Who is the mysterious prostitute Sonny picks up...?

"The Game — By the Rules" by Linda Knights: A man from Castillo's past could be the end of Crockett...

Art by Adrian Morgan.

BLAKE'S 7/ROBIN OF SHERWOOD

"Seventh Sojourner" by Sue Walls & Dee Beetem: Gauda Prime has a lasting effect on Kerr Avon when he is catapulted into the past and ends up one of the "Faeries"!

Art by Laura Virgil.

ROBIN OF SHERWOOD/PROFESSIONALS

"A Stitch in Time" by Sheila Paulson: Magnir isn't half as confused as Bodie and Doyle are!

Art by Barb Johnson. More ROBIN OF SHERWOOD from Jacqueline Tasco.

PROFESSIONALS

"Fear of Flying" by Linda Turrell: Bodie thinks he must be seeing things...or could it possibly be true that Doyle and Peter Pan bear an amazing resemblance to each other...?

Art by Susan Lovett.

DR. WHO

"The War Horse" by Linda Turrell: The Doctor and Leela meet up with a living legend...

Art by Maryann Jorgensen.

STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION

"Analysis of a Mission" by Linda Knights: Riker questions his command ability and Troi must help him come to terms...

More by Janet Walker. Art by Laura Virgil, Anvita Smith and others.

BEAUTY & THE BEAST

"Origins" by Sheila Paulson: Where did Vincent really come from...?

More by Joan Bright. Art by Leah Rosenthal & Laura Virgil.

TOUR OF DUTY

"Sarge" by Joan Bright: After the war, Sergeant Anderson is driving a cab, but still teaching soldiers lessons...and learning from them.

STAR WARS

"The Man Who Could Be God" by Katrina Larkin: Han Solo wanted the ship more than anything...he even wanted it bad enough to work for the tall stranger with a mysterious past...

Art by Katrina Larkin. Also, "The Wolves of Metracia" by Katrina Larkin.

More featuring STARSKY & HUTCH, THE DUKES OF HAZZARD, KILL THE DEAD and other fandoms. More submissions coveted, especially in the following fandoms (I've already got some fabulous artwork in these fandoms longing for stories to match!): THE EQUALIZER, MACGYVER, STINGRAY, WAR OF THE WORLDS, BEAUTY AND THE BEAST, THE MAN FROM UNCLE, BLACK ADDER, STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION. As always, I will consider stories from any and all fandoms! Artists needed for SIMON & SIMON and STARSKY & HUTCH.

The zine is currently scheduled for a MadisMast 1990 debut. Be there!

To reserve, send $5.00 + a long SASE to: Ann Worthem, 1402 Allison Ave., Altamonte Springs, Florida 32701. Please make all checks payable to Ann Worthem.

Issue #4 of SOUTHERN LIGHTS is still available in a reprint edition. This special reprint has the original full color covers and white GBC binding. It features MIAMI VICE, SIMON & SIMON, BLAKES 7, MAGNUM P.I., WIZARDS & WARRIORS, HILLSTREET BLUES, BIG VALLEY, ADONOLF, SCARECROW & MRS. KING, REMINGTON STEELE, THE DEVLIN CONNECTION, and others. Contributors include: Sheila Paulson, Linda Turrell, Linda Knights, Theresa Barick, Marcia Brin, Jacqueline Tasco, Kathy Hintze, CarolMel Ambassador, Laura Virgil, Anvita Smith, Jill Walls, Leah Rosenthal, Louann Qualls, Mysti Frank, Jeff Morris, L. A. Carr, Jocelyn Munro, Mary Robertson, Dani Lane, Theresa Buffaloe, Maryann Jorgensen, and others. $21.00, postage included.

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on Gauda
Prime.

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Avon.

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familiar?

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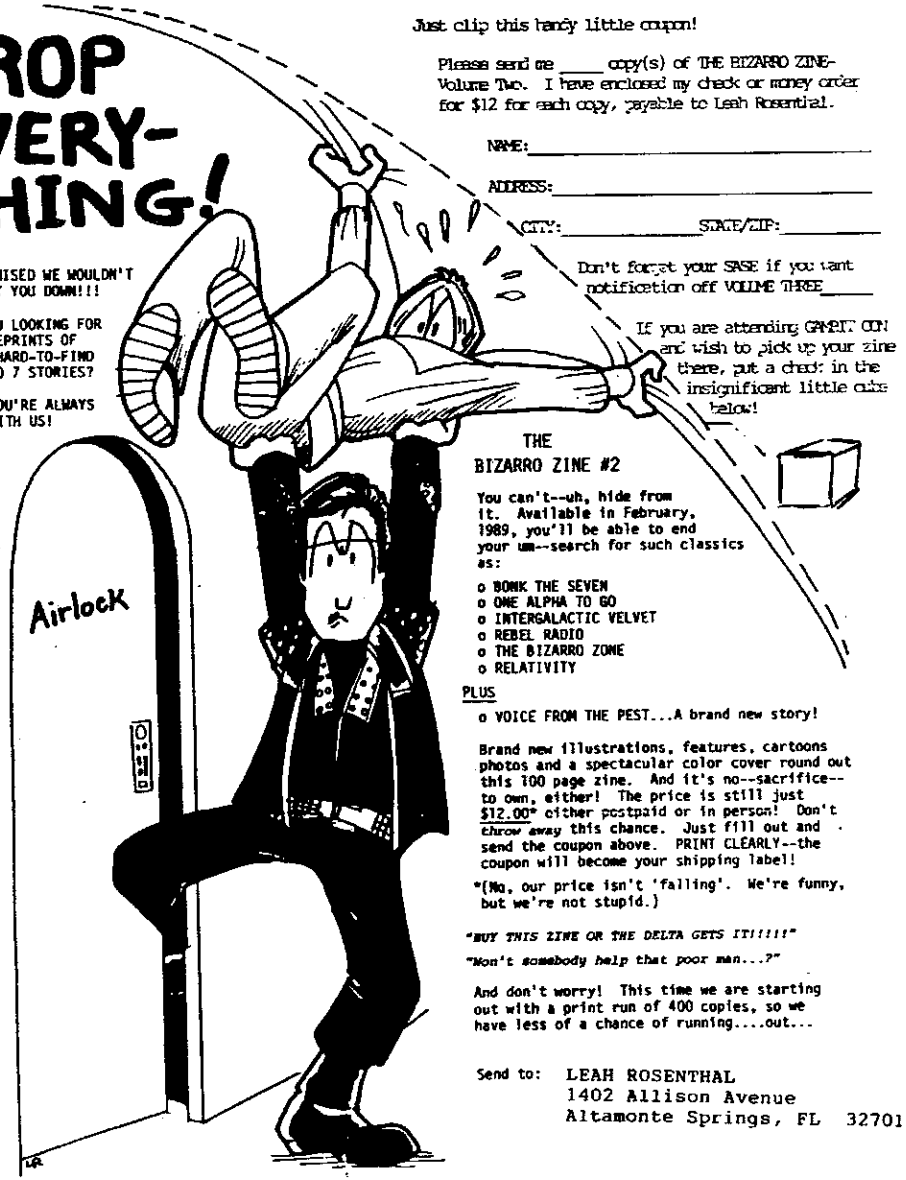
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Send to: LEAH ROSENTHAL
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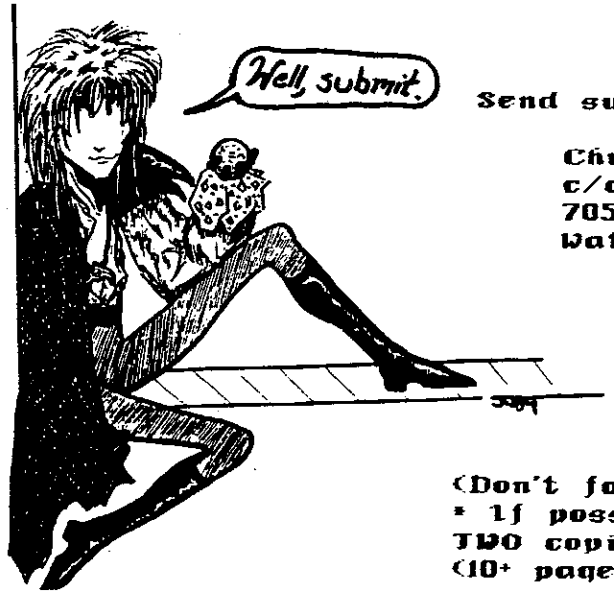
Thirteen O'Clock High

A Labyrinth fanzine.

Now accepting all filks, stories, parodies, poems, artwork and crossovers.

PLEASE NOTE:
1) This is a PG-13 fanzine. Neither "adult" nor "slash" material will be accepted.
2) This is not a David Bowie fanzine. [But if you feel you absolutely must (and can) write a really good story wherein Screaming Lord Byron meets Jareth, don't let us stop you.] In other words, Jareth doesn't have to be included in all your material -- if he is, that's just fine with us, but we will cheerfully take material about *any* of the *Labyrinth* characters.



Send submissions* to:

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(Don't forget a SASE!)
* If possible, please send TWO copies of long stories (10+ pages)!

SAMURAI ERRANT

ISSUE TWO

CAVALIER TALES QUIXOTIC AND PROFANE -- A BUCKAROO BANZAI FANZINE

Stone Cold Crazy by Arcane Annie -- On the bus to school, Buckaroo's study is interrupted by a kid playing an energetic version of The Magnificent Seven.

'Buckaroo? Hell of a name.' -- 'Tell me about it.'

When Numbers Get Serious by Stew and Arcane Annie -- Buckaroo is bringing 'someone special' home from Oxford... but his best friend Rawhide reacts in ways unexpected.

Rawhide Was Somewhere Else... by Downtown -- The Institute just doesn't seem right one day -- one of their number has vanished.

It was so unlike Rawhide to be this mysterious.

Perfect Fit by Dreamspinner -- Perfect Tommy endeavours to keep his perfect image in shape, despite having a rotten morning.

Three hours and a dozen shoe shops later...

The Most Disagreeable Week by Stew -- Rawhide and Reno are rescued from their thermos chest floating off the coast of Japan, after sharing a week of despair.

Sabbatical and The Rectification Of Names by Arcane Annie -- Rawhide and Perfect Tommy each recount their adventures in Nepal.

They call this valley the 'Lap of Heaven'.

'Find The Jet Car' Said The President: A Buckaroo Banzai Thriller by Tim Howe -- The adventure continues...

Mrs Rawhide by Buckskin Brenda -- On learning of Rawhide's death, Jenny McKern tells the story of their marriage and seperation.

Everywhere I turned Banzai had stepped into the picture.

Banzai Haiku by Stew (on behalf of Buckaroo)

The Rocky Horror Banzai Show by Downtown -- Buckaroo and Peggy's Superthunderjetcar has a flat battery... But help is available from the castle down the road... Or is it???

It was the first time either of them had seen suspenders made out of leather.

A Perfect Ending by Ratbag -- BBI Tasy has had a rotten day, mainly because Perfect Tommy neglected to fill the Saab with gas.

As soon as she found him, she was going to kill him!

Jason by Tolchin -- Perfect Tommy has been allowed to drive the bus, with unhappy results. Until Rawhide spots something on the road that Tommy almost ran over...

Ask Not What Your Country Can Do For You... by Arcane Annie and Stew -- BBI Kira recounts her and Tommy's adventures, as they try to do something about what they believe in despite controversy from both within and outside the Institute.

'What if you get caught?' -- 'Won't be the first time.'

Tear Drops by Stew -- Tommy asks Reno for help with some poetry he's writing...

And much more (including poetry!) in a rather large 132 pages, illustrated by Buckskin Brenda and Tim Howe (with help from Arcane Annie). Romance is both straight and slash, but there's nothing too offensively squidgy involved. Contributions for Issue Three welcome!

Julie 'Stew' Bozza
3/13-15 Mowatt St
QUEANBEYAN NSW 2620
AUSTRALIA

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SAMURAI ERRANT

CAVALIER TALES QUIXOTIC AND PROFANE: A BUCKAROO BANZAI FANZINE

Buckaroo's First Recruit by Stew -- Rawhide is alone and bored, bar-tending in Chicago, when in walks Buckaroo...

"All I need is a few decent, intelligent people like Rawhide here... and in answer to Xan's World Crime League, I'll have my Cavaliers!"

And Emerged A Better Man by Bepo -- Perfect Tommy is thrown out of Cambridge, so what else is there to do but join the Foreign Legion?

The fort of many evils it was called was it?

Hopes and Dreams by Stew -- Alone with Buckaroo on a mission to Cuba, Rawhide reflects on his feelings for his best friend.

Maybe we were all in love with him back then. What more natural state than being in love with Buckaroo Banzai?

Going Errant by Stew -- Buckaroo and the Cavaliers drop into the 13th century and have tea with King Pellinore and Oolong.

Auda by Stew -- Buckaroo and Reno are on a mission in Arabia.

"You want to buy my daughter?" the fat old Arab asked congenially.

"Find The Jetcar" Said The President: A Buckaroo Banzai Thriller by Tim Howe -- A BB adventure in comic book form.

Irregular Happenings Down Under by the Oz BBIs -- Join Arcane Annie, Buckskin Brenda, Downtown, Faux Pas, Question Mark, Stew Squash and Tolkien as they rid Australia of the last invidious nest of Red Lectroids on behalf of Buckaroo.

"Institute policy -- there's always a party at the end of an adventure. You see if there isn't," said Stew

Oh Give Me A Home, Where The Cantaloupes Roam... by Anne Murphy -- The funniest solution ever to the watermelon mystery.

The Vampyre Morgan by Stew -- Morgan concentrates his seductive charms on Buckaroo and the wary Rawhide. Meanwhile, unconcerned, Perfect Tommy makes his best move on Billy's fiance Felicia.

The scientist in Buckaroo, the child and the adult and the poet in him, all were fascinated by this fiend.

Living Many Secret Lives Among You by Stew -- Buckaroo finds something disturbingly familiar about the dark figure leading him through the sordid streets of New York.

It couldn't be true, he couldn't be sane if it was true

The Andersson Report leaked to an expectant public by Arcane Annie -- Learn the truth behind the Penny Paradox.

Certain comments she made unthinkingly... and her remarkable resemblance to out dear, departed Peggy, all made Buckaroo suspicious about the woman's true identity.

Broken Leg Blues by Stew -- Rawhide, incapacitated and irritable, tries to solve the age-old cat-up-a-tree problem

And much more in a blockbuster 167 pages, copiously illustrated by Bepo, Buckskin Brenda and Tim Howe. Romance is both straight and slash, but there's nothing too offensively squidgy involved

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□あなた自身の美しさを演出しますー。

PORTALS

#6 (Volume 3, Number 2)

In this issue:

"The Adventure of the Temporal Traveler" by Thomas Falco (DW): "Silhouetted in the doorway was a tall figure with a broad-rimmed hat. In the meagre light I tried to perceive his features, and just for a moment, I was reminded of Holmes. Then the figure entered the house and darkness covered him. He stopped suddenly, just after passing through the doorway. He held his hands slightly out at his sides and peered about cautiously. 'Who's there?' came a deep, rich voice from the intruder."

"Children and Adults" by MaryAnn Johanson (DW): "'Ayren,' the Doctor called gently and tugged on my hand. I turned to see what he was looking at. In a corner, behind a flight chair, someone was huddled, blocking those runway lights and casting shadows. No, there were two someones, I saw as the Doctor swivelled the chair out of the way. Two children — a boy, maybe five or six, with his arms wrapped around another, smaller child, a girl who couldn't have been more than two."

"Audio File" by Linda A. Furey and Julie A. Nowak (B7): "Blake: 'So, how's the wife and kids?' Avon: 'I don't have a wife and kids.' Blake: 'Oh, that's right. How's your girlfriend, then?' Avon: 'I killed her.'"

"Star Trek: The Parody" by Michael S. Lucart (ST): "McCoy waved a script in his hands. "I don't understand why I'm supposed to be angry right now! In the script, it says that I 'stomp angrily onto the bridge, ranting and raving.' Dammit, Jim, you know I don't know how to rave!'"

PLUS: "The Crying of Lot 42" by Furey (B7); "Refrain" by Rachel Nash (DW); "A Handful of Dust" by Diana Fox (B7); "Aftershock" by Lucart (DW); "Aquaria" by Allen Rausch (fantasy); much much more fiction and poetry.

ART by Kevin Duncan, Lucart, Furey, Nowak, Lynne Alissa Witten, MaryAnn Johanson, Debra Rauss, Manachino and Duncan.

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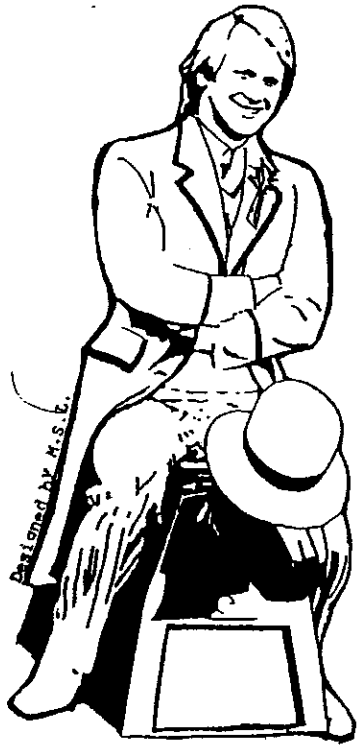

THE CRICKETER

Larceny in Lizon by Elaine Christland: "Peri tried to tempt me into a tour of the closest cabins but I stood in a corner — no seats anywhere — and brooded. Aiding and abetting fugitives: Duar could add that to my list. Illegal landers who could have anything from bonesnatching to drugrunning in their rep, and I was with them."

Enslavement by MaryAnn Johanson: "The hallway above was much worse, inky black and so quiet it was distracting. I was about to cough or clear my throat or scream just to break the silence, when something did it for me. A soft crying, like an animal whimpering, lonely and sad and injured. Not a human sound."

The T'Srinesti Gambit by Michael S. Lucart: "There on the screen was a large man wearing white robes, with a yellow sash across his chest, standing surrounded by fog. The man's face was emotionless, although deep lines revealed his immense age. Confused by the sight, Tegan looked up to ask the Doctor who he was, but saw that her traveling companion was as dumbfounded as she."

Let Nothing You Dismay by Liz Shaw: "Even though he was obviously determined not to enjoy himself, Turlough had to appreciate the beauty of the small English village, its fourteenth century buildings dusted lightly with snow, its streets still untouched by anything but the feet of birds. 'It's pretty,' he said reluctantly. 'Like a drawing.'"

PLUS: Fate of the Universe by Autumn Lee, Mending Ways by Thomas Falco; Reflections in a Teacup by Rachel Nash; MORE.

Cover by Ann Larimer; interior art by: Emily Penfield, Debra Reuss, Cynthia Case, Theresa Buffaloe, Julie Nowak, Kevin Duncan, Duncan & Al Manachino, and Michael S. Lucart.

F.Y.I.

The following is a list of highly-recommended groups, letterzines, and fanzine publishers that you might want to look into. Entries marked with a "*" deal with adult material; when inquiring, if you don't want information of that sort, be sure to say so. Don't forget to enclose a SASE (**S**elf **A**ddressed **S**tamped **E**nvelope) with your inquiries!

DW-Doctor Who **B7**-Blakes 7 **BB**-Buckaroo Banzai **Bu**-Beauty & Beast **M**-Mixed Media

LETTERZINES, CLUBS:

St. Louis CIA
P.O. Box 733
St. Louis, MO 63188
(DW)

Anglofile
P.O. Box 33515
Decatur, GA 30033
(British Media)

Rabble Rousers
5312 Southwest
St. Louis, MO 63139
(B7)

Prydonians of Prynceton
P.O. Box 3194
Princeton, NJ 08543
(DW/B7)

Pressure Point
6020 Westchester T-2
College Park, MD 20740
(B7 *)

LIBERATION
431 W. Barry #122
Chicago, IL 60657
(B7)

Unofficial Harry Sullivan FC
P.O. Box 4916
Englewood, CO 80155
(DW *)

The Lost Seska
P.O. Box 25
Dunedin, FL 34697
(B7 *)

The Delta Grades
2626 Bremerton Rd.
Brentwood, MO 63144
(DW/B7)

FANZINES

Cheryl Duval
P.O. Box 179
New Ellenton, SC 29809
(DW,Bu,M)

4M Press
P.O. Box 58644
St. Louis, MO 63158
(B7,M *)

Zara Publications
P.O. Box 7812
Macon, GA 31209
(DW)

STRAIGHT BLAKES
P.O. Box 19715
Washington, DC 20036
(B7 *)

ABOVE & BELOW
435 McCall Road
Rochester, NY 14616
(Bu)

THE CAVALIER
342 E. 53rd St. #4D
New York, NY 1022
(BB)

GATEWAY TO TIME
P.O. Box 733
St. Louis, MO 63188
(DW,B7)

NEARLY FATAL ATTRACTION
510 Troywood
Troy, MI 48083
(Ghostbusters)

'NEATH THE SIDEWALKS OF NY
2561 Elsinore
Pontiac, MI 48054
(Bu)

PROBABILITY SQUARE
2207 Gaylord
Dallas, TX 75227
(B7)

Xenon Press
431 W. Barry #122
Chicago, IL 60657
(B7 *)

Susan M. Garrett
142 Sunvalley Drive
Toms River, NJ 08753
(DW,M)

Judy K. Spreng
2270 C6 Jericho Rd
Aurora, IL 60506
(DW)

Space Rat Press
10 Hall Court
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(B7)

Pony Press, Ltd.
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(B7 *)

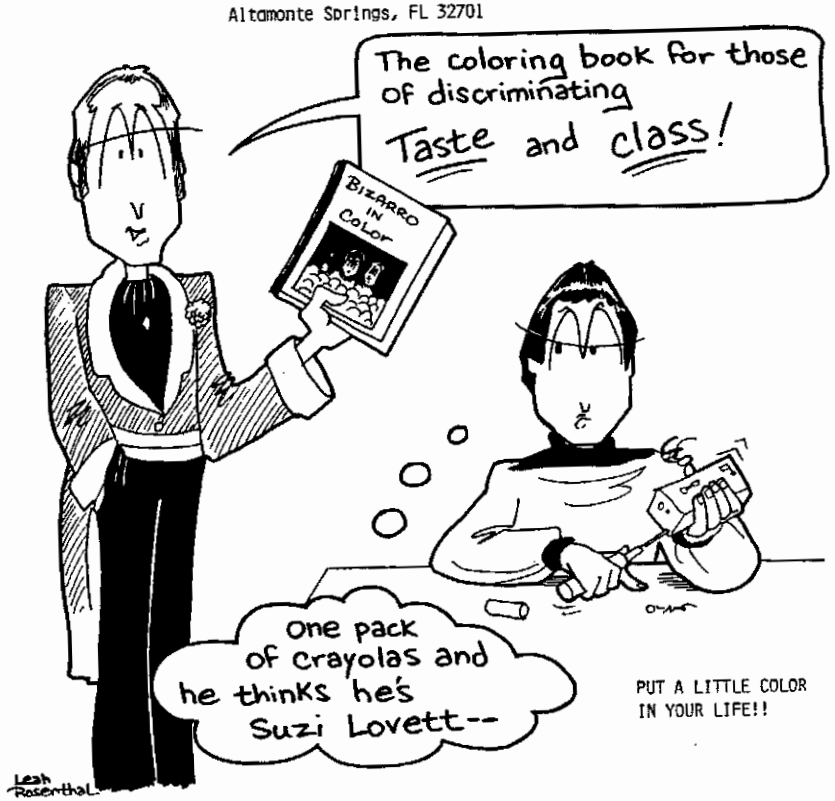
By Popular Demand!

ANNOUNCING THE BIZARRO COLORING ALBUM!

Because you asked for it (when I thought you knew better--), Poncho Press is proud to announce the upcoming ~~shocked~~ debut of THE BIZARRO COLORING ALBUM. This fanzine will feature dozens and dozens of illustrations from your favorite BIZARRO 7 stories, with almost no text to distract you. You can use them as pin-ups, or amuse yourself by creating color masterpieces, embroidery patterns or wrapping yesterday's fries. The zine will be spiral-bound for easy opening...and each and every one of the first hundred copies sold will come with your very own box of crayons! Such a deal! Plus, THE BIZARRO COLORING ALBUM will also feature brand-new art, created especially for this portfolio, with some of your BIZARRO favorites!

DUE FOR RELEASE THIS SUMMER...to make sure you don't miss out, simply send a self-addressed, stamped #10 envelope. When the zine is ready, you'll be among the first to know!

SEND TO: LEAH ROSENTHAL
1402 Allison Avenue
Altamonte Springs, FL 32701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- SWEET, SAVAGE SOMA
- STILL THE DEAD
- KIND OF A DRAG
- THROWING IT ALL AWAY

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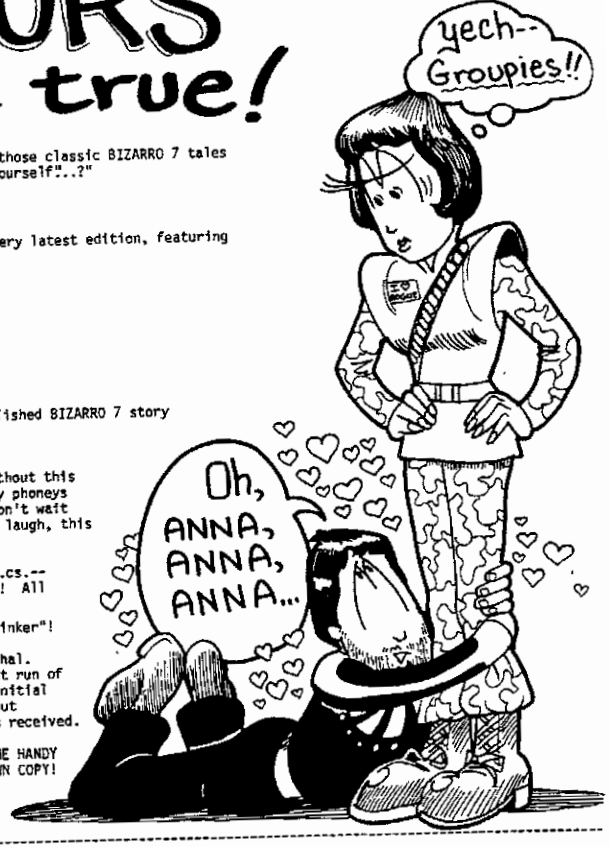

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